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Le Cnes enterre

Le Sepra disparaît. Ce service du Cnes chargé de collecter les témoignages sur les ovnis a toujours été controversé. Son bilan scientifique semble bien maigre. Incompétence, accusent ses détracteurs. Manque de moyens, répond son directeur. Mais qu'y a-t-il vraiment dans les 6 000 dossiers de phénomènes étranges accumulés depuis 27 ans ?

La France va-t-elle renvoyer les ovnis dans le cosmos ?

Le Cnes, qui avait ouvert en 1977 un service quasi unique au monde chargé de collecter les informations sur les phénomènes aérospatiaux non identifiés, s'interroge aujourd'hui sur le bien-fondé d'une telle activité.

Le Service d'expertise des phénomènes rares aérospatiaux (Sepra) *n'existe plus en tant que tel depuis la nouvelle organisation du Centre national d'études spatiales au 1er janvier 2004, mais l'activité se poursuit,* affirme le directeur de la communication du Cnes, Arnaud Benedetti, en réponse à un article de la revue Ciel et Espace qui, début juin, accusait le Cnes d'« *enterrer les ovnis* ».

Ancien directeur du Sepra, devenu aujourd'hui simple « chargé de mission », Jean-Jacques Velasco confirme mener une activité identique à celle de décembre 2003 et rester l'expert ès-phénomènes aérospatiaux non identifiés du Cnes.

D'abord dénommé Gepan (Groupe d'étude des phénomènes aérospatiaux non identifiés), puis rebaptisé Sepra en 1983, ce service a employé jusqu'à sept personnes à temps plein, avant d'être réduit à la portion congrue. Quand on a créé le Gepan, raconte Hubert Curien, alors président du Cnes, « *l'opinion publique s'intéressait aux atterrissages imprévus. Il était donc nécessaire que l'organisme public de recherche sur l'espace regarde ce qu'il en était vraiment. Nous avions un devoir d'expertise scientifique* », ajoute l'ancien ministre de la Recherche.

Pourtant, le monde scientifique reste très frileux sur ce sujet. Et même si le Cnes affirme le contraire, le Sepra a toujours été « *un sujet de gêne* » pour l'agence spatiale, considère François Louange, qui en 2001 a réalisé un audit du Sepra. Un malaise accentué en avril par la publication d'un ouvrage, « Ovnis, l'évidence », où Jean-Jacques Velasco tente de démontrer que des extra-terrestres surveillent nos installations nucléaires.

Le Service d'expertise des phénomènes rares aérospatiaux : une gêne pour l'agence spatiale

Selon François Louange, dès la commande de l'audit en 2000, le directeur général du Cnes, Gérard Brachet, constatait « *que ce service ne tournait pas rond, qu'il ne s'entendait pas avec les relations publiques et qu'il y avait des pressions de partout pour le supprimer* ».

Arnaud Benedetti reconnaît que si, « *pour le moment, les missions et les moyens de M. Velasco ne sont pas modifiés* », il existe « *une réflexion sur le positionnement de cette activité* », qui doit être « *plus encadrée et plus performante* ».

La direction assure pourtant qu'elle « *ne va pas renier son passé* ». « *On peut imaginer que le recueil de données sur la partie spatiale reste au Cnes,* explique Arnaud Benedetti, *tandis que la partie interprétation pourrait être confiée à une structure ad hoc* », intégrant d'autres partenaires tels l'armée de l'air, l'aviation civile, Météo-France ou encore la gendarmerie, qui tous collaborent déjà avec le Cnes à l'étude des phénomènes aé
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Ces propositio
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l'absence d'un tel
la porte aux secte
nel* », souligne l'a

Aujourd'hui, «
été acté », assure
marque Hubert
« *la grande épo
sur les ovnis est
une capacité de

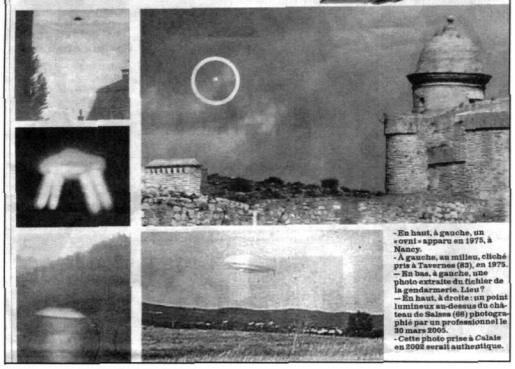
THE DEATH . . .

La Dépêche du Midi

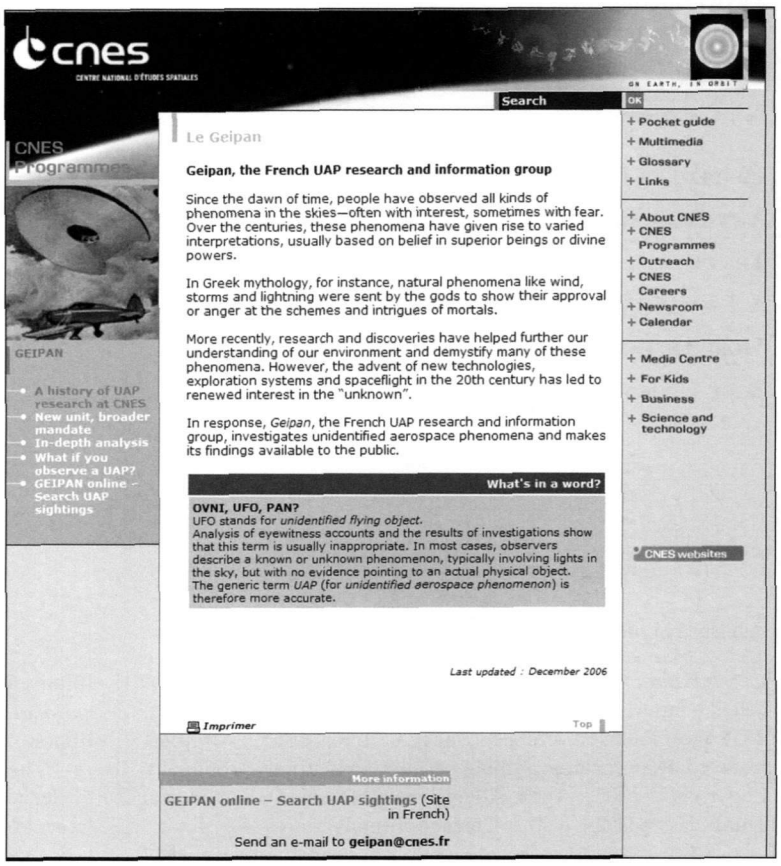
FAITS DIVE

Espace. Le CNES de Toulouse va mettre en ligne 3 000 témoignages sur des phénomènes non identifiés.

Les Ovnis arrivent sur internet



- En haut, à gauche, un « ovni » apparu en 1975, à Nancy.
- À gauche, au milieu, cliché pris à Tavernes (83), en 1975.
— En bas, à gauche, une photo extraite du fichier de la gendarmerie. Lieu ?
— En haut, à droite : un point lumineux au-dessus du château de Saissa (66) photographié par un professionnel le 30 mars 2005.
- Cette photo prise à Calais en 2002 serait authentique.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A history of UAP research at CNES
New unit, broader mandate
In-depth analysis
What if you observe a UAP?
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Le Geipan
Geipan, the French UAP research and information group
Since the dawn of time, people have observed all kinds of phenomena in the skies—often with interest, sometimes with fear. Over the centuries, these phenomena have given rise to varied interpretations, usually based on belief in superior beings or divine powers.
In Greek mythology, for instance, natural phenomena like wind, storms and lightning were sent by the gods to show their approval or anger at the schemes and intrigues of mortals.
More recently, research and discoveries have helped further our understanding of our environment and demystify many of these phenomena. However, the advent of new technologies, exploration systems and spaceflight in the 20th century has led to renewed interest in the "unknown".
In response, Geipan, the French UAP research and information group, investigates unidentified aerospace phenomena and makes its findings available to the public.
What's in a word?
OVNI, UFO, PAN?
UFO stands for unidentified flying object.
Analysis of eyewitness accounts and the results of investigations show that this term is usually inappropriate. In most cases, observers describe a known or unknown phenomenon, typically involving lights in the sky, but with no evidence pointing to an actual physical object.
The generic term UAP (for unidentified aerospace phenomenon) is therefore more accurate.
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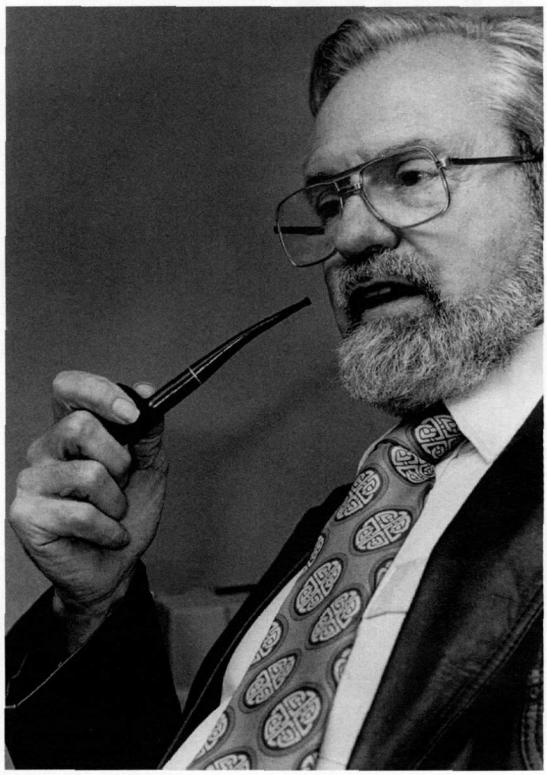

J. Allen Hynek
1910-1986

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INCIDENT AT O'HARE AIRPORT

BY LESLIE KEAN

On January 1, the *Chicago Tribune* ran a stunning front-page story about a UFO sighting at O'Hare Airport on November 7, 2006. *Tribune* transportation reporter Jon Hilkevitch followed up on leads provided by Peter Davenport of the National UFO Reporting Center, who had received two written reports from eyewitnesses at O'Hare and posted them on the NUFORC website.

The case is exceptional due to the high number of responsible witnesses to the UFO, mostly United Airlines employees including pilots, who are trained to distinguish among different aircraft. Secondly, the UFO had penetrated Class B restricted airspace over a major airport during its afternoon rush hour, which clearly represented a safety hazard. The National Aviation Reporting Center on Anomalous Phenomena (NARCAP) has been investigating this aspect of the case, and was scheduled to release a detailed study by its team of experts in June (www.narcap.org).

Unfortunately, no radar returns or photographs (so far as we know) were obtained to document the presence of the object, but voice tapes have been released of the sighting being reported to Air Traffic Control. Additional information to be received through the FOIA is pending.

Hilkevitch's article—unusual in its straightforward, detailed reporting on the incident—said that pilots, managers, and mechanics from United Airlines looked up from their ground positions at the terminal and saw a disc-shaped craft hovering silently just under the thick cloudbank.

According to these witnesses, the strange object, poised about 1,500 feet over Gate C-17 at the United Terminal, looked as large as a quarter or half dollar held at arm's length, Hilkevitch told me in a later conversation.

A pilot announced the sighting over inbound ground radio for all grounded planes; a United taxi mechanic moving a Boeing 777 heard radio chatter about the flying disc and looked up; pilots waiting to take off opened the front windows to lean out and see the object for themselves.

Chicago Tribune *reporter Jon Hilkevitch*

After about five minutes, with many eyes now fixated on it, the wingless vehicle shot straight up at an incredible speed and was gone, leaving a crisp hole in the dense clouds like a cookie cutter, with blue sky visible at the top. (See www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/chi-0701010141jan01,1,3957154.column, and www.nuforc.org for more details.)

"It burst through the thick cloud layer creating a large, open space of blue sky," Hilkevitch reported on local CLTV news. "It took some minutes for that opening to close up when the clouds drifted back together. This was extremely unusual, according to the witnesses. Airplanes just don't react like this. They slice through clouds."

This was definitely not an airplane, according to witnesses, many of them shaken by what they saw.

Some were awed; others afraid. "This was nothing we are familiar with," said a United manager, who ran out of his office when he received a radio call about a metallic, hovering object. He watched it for about a minute, until it disappeared. "I immediately called our operations center to confirm the sighting and the FAA was contacted while I drove to the other concourse to talk to the witnesses," he reported six days later to NUFORC.

"The witness credibility is beyond question, and safety was a big concern," Hilkevitch said in January, explaining the importance of the story. He noted that the witnesses all described the same thing: a hovering disc making no noise which shot up and left a clear hole in the cloud. "The only discrepancy was that some said it was rotating, and others didn't, and in the size estimations," he said.

Leslie Kean is an investigative reporter with the Coalition for Freedom of Information. A much-shortened version of this story was published in the Providence Journal *and the* Sacramento Bee, *and was distributed nationally by the Scripps Howard Wire Service.*

In a follow-up conversation on February 22, Hilkevitch said that a conservative estimate of witness numbers had grown to several hundred—combining people who saw either the object or the cloud hole, at the airport and in surrounding areas. Many contacted him after the story broke, and Hilkevitch intends to write a second story when he has been able to analyze the additional FAA data.

Official denial

The safety concerns of the United employees with regards to this incursion of restricted airspace were apparently of no concern to the FAA, which is tasked to protect our airspace and aircraft.

The FAA and United Airlines at first denied having any information about the incident, but both had to acknowledge the sighting when a tape of a United supervisor's call to the airport tower, reporting an elliptical-shaped craft sitting motionless over Concourse C of United's Terminal 1, was released by the FAA.

To the dismay of the many highly qualified observers who have no doubt about what they saw, the FAA then attributed the incident to a "weather phenomenon." This followed an initial attempt to explain the incident as some kind of misinterpreted lights reflecting off the clouds. However, the event occurred in daylight and there were no lights involved. No official investigation was conducted.

Hilkevitch—who has never reported on a UFO incident before and thus is not familiar with the usual patterns of dismissal by authorities—was mystified by the FAA disinterest in the incident. "If this had been a plane, it would have been investigated," he told me. "The FAA treats the smallest safety issue as very important. It will investigate a coffee pot getting loose in the galley and falling while a plane is landing."

"The safely implications of a vehicle operating at low altitude over a major airport outside the authority of air traffic control (regardless if it's a Cessna 172, a helicopter, an amateur radio-controlled model or ???) are obvious," says NASA aviation expert Brian E. Smith, a former manager within NASA's Aviation Safety and Security Program, in an email for this story. "Managers should want to hear about such vehicle operations before they become accidents or disasters."

According to the *Tribune* story, United Airlines did interview some witnesses, who were then told not to talk about the incident. Despite their large numbers, all witnesses so far have remained publicly anonymous, due to fears for job security. One United employee told me that he is remaining nameless because he might be perceived as "betraying" his company. Witnesses do not want to be "caught talking to the media since the airline had officially claimed that nothing happened," he wrote in an email.

Despite the impact of the sighting on witnesses, they have simply been left alone with their unsettling observations. "I realize this is a controversial position, but with my extensive knowledge of modern aviation technologies, I know this UFO probably wasn't created on this planet," one told me in February.

Media response

"The reaction around the world was phenomenal," Hilkevitch commented in January. "This one story eclipsed anything I've done before."

Anonymous United Airlines employee

For a few days following the *Tribune* story, the national media responded enthusiastically, yet the reporting ranged all over the map as if the anchors, a bit thrown by the nature of the story, were unsure how to handle it. CNN's Gary Tuchman interviewed a nervous United Airlines employee disguised in shadow while an artist sketched the craft on camera, as if the person were involved in some kind of unsolved crime. This was the witness's only appearance on television.

On January 4, MSNBC's Keith Olbermann challenged the provocative FAA "flip-flop" from its initial denial to the "silly explanation" of a weather phenomenon, asking "Why not say we don't know?" He lamented that officials had closed the case "as we always do when the mysteries of space elude our feeble understanding." Well said, with clarity and passion.

But then Olbermann brought on his "Chief Astronomer" Derrick Pitts of the Franklin Institute for one of the more ludicrous attempts at debunking that I've heard. Pitts told MSNBC viewers that there were many things the O'Hare sighting could have been, but he suggested that it was due to "holiday cheer." (I suspect he thought that since the story broke on New Year's day, the sighting must have occurred the night before.) "The idea that they would suddenly turn up this report is a little suspicious to me," Pitts proclaimed. "We'll have to hear from the aliens to find out."

Pitts indirectly suggested that the pilots who reported the incident were drinking on the job, while responsible for the lives of hundreds of passengers—a rather serious and demeaning accusation. He then goes on to state that if the reports on this totally unexpected incident had not been "suddenly" turned in, they would have been less "suspicious." Of course, this makes no sense at all, and simply

reflects Pitts's personal discomfort, prejudice, and ignorance about the whole matter. Most viewers, of course, would not stop and think about the absurdity of his statements; therefore they were most likely left with these barbs in their minds rather than Olbermann's more sobering and informed comments in the moments before.

Many people, however, went directly to the *Chicago Tribune* website for the original story. It quickly achieved the status of the most-read piece in the entire history of the *Tribune*'s site, receiving over a million hits. Hilkevitch was barraged with emails from all over the world. "There is a universal feeling that the government knows more than it's willing to tell," he commented.

Cloud hole not weather, experts say

"In the absence of any kind of factual evidence, there is nothing more we can do," FAA spokesperson Tony Molinaro said in a phone interview on January 16. "No FAA controller saw anything. There was nothing on radar either. No one in the tower or anyone flying saw anything. It was all seen from the ground."

Weather is the best "guess" for what it was, he said, explaining that witnesses may simply have observed a "hole-punch cloud" as it is colloquially called on internet sites. After all, he said that such a cloud hole is in "a perfect circular shape like a round disc" and has "vapor going up into it." In other words, people mistook the cloud hole for a disc, and the movement of gravity-defying vapor was what witnesses believed to be the disc ascending through the clouds.

Indeed, hole-punch clouds *are* the closest natural phenomenon to what was seen that November afternoon. But still, this could not possibly be what witnesses saw, according to scientists.

Hole-punch clouds are formed only at below freezing temperatures, when ice crystals from a cloud above a lower cloud deck fall. Rather than by upwardly mobile vapor, referred to by Molinaro, these unusual cloud holes are formed by ice crystals falling downward. Super-cooled water droplets in the second cloud adhere to the crystals, enlarging them and leaving a hole around them in the cloud. The crystal mass gains weight and falls further, below the second cloud, evaporating when it hits warmer air.

Large opening in an altocumulus cloud deck above Elewijt, Belgium. Photo taken on July 10, 2005, by Gert van Saet. This "hole punch cloud" most likely results from falling ice crystals.

The temperature at the 1,900-foot cloud bank where the O'Hare hole was formed by the UFO was 48–50° F., according to National Weather Service data provided by EPA weather expert and meteorologist William Pucket, an associate with NARCAP. Climatologists and cloud physicists interviewed for this story all stated that temperatures must be below freezing for a hole-punch cloud to explain the sighting.

I then inquired whether a cloud hole could be formed by any other natural method. "There are two ways you can get cloud holes," Daniel Breed told me, a scientist with the National Center for Atmospheric Research specializing in cloud physics. "In addition to falling ice crystals at below freezing temperatures, the other way is by evaporation, through the introduction of dryer air or heat into the cloud bank."

The natural induction of dry air into a cloud, Breed explained, was unlikely to have caused the O'Hare hole because the dry air is usually folded into a cloud from above, making many pockets; the 1,800-foot depth of the O'Hare bank would be too thick for such a hole to go clean through.

After speaking to four weather experts, I was left with only one possible cause for the cloud hole: evaporation by heat. And this just happens to conform to the witnesses' explanation of what they saw. It fits the scenario of a high-energy, round object radiating intense heat cutting through the cloud bank. Thus, isn't this the most logical explanation, the best "guess," for what happened?

How reliable is radar, anyway?

FAA spokesperson Tony Molinaro told me that if the object had been registered on radar, the agency would have conducted an investigation. "Unless there are concrete facts, there is nothing more we can do."

Yet, many experts say that such a demand is unreasonable and sometimes implausible for cases involving unrecognizable airborne objects with unusual characteristics. John Callahan, division chief of the FAA's Accidents and Investigations branch in Washington in the 1980s, says it's not the least bit surprising that this UFO was not picked up on radar—but that doesn't mean there was nothing there.

He points out that radar technology is not always capable of capturing the sometimes bizarre movements of these objects. "The equipment the FAA has will not paint a spaceship," says Callahan, who is now retired.

Callahan outlined three reasons why this is so: "They [UFOs] have no transponder; they are often too big, so the radar thinks they're weather; they're too fast for the radar to get a hit on before they're out of range."

Radar readings with an unrecognizable signature are

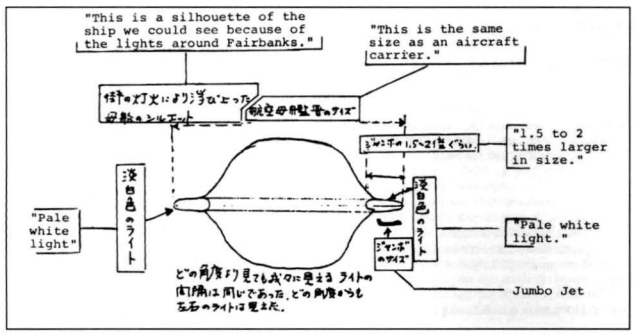
Jim McClenahen

often automatically sent out through a second system as weather. As for the hovering object at O'Hare, Callahan says it is likely that it would not show up, "or if it did it would be a small dot and they would not give it much concern."

Jim McClenahen, a retired FAA air traffic control specialist with over three decades of experience, says that busy controllers concentrate on the aircraft they're working, focusing out surrounding items that are not important to them. Also, if the object appeared as a target imbedded in ground clutter, it would likely be ignored.

Therefore, in evaluating the accuracy or import of witness descriptions of an anomalous airborne object, the relevance of the craft being recorded by radar seems questionable.

John Callahan speaks from direct experience that makes him an authority on the FAA's handling of UFO incidents. In 1986 he reviewed extensive data generated by a Japanese Airline cargo Boeing 747 encounter with a gigantic, walnut-shaped UFO over Alaska, seen at close range by three Japanese pilots. Every detail, including radar readings, was recorded in taped exchanges for 31 minutes between the aircraft and the FAA controllers at the Anchorage Air Route Traffic Control Center.


"This is a silhouette of the ship we could see because of the lights around Fairbanks."
"This is the same size as an aircraft carrier."
"1.5 to 2 times larger in size."
"Pale white light."
"Pale white light"
Jumbo Jet

Drawing by Capt. Kenju Terauchi, pilot of JAL 1628, a month and a half after his sighting November 17, 1986, of a "gigantic spaceship" over Alaska

The Japanese pilot, copilot, and flight engineer were interviewed extensively by FAA officials in the days and months following, providing independent descriptions of the "spaceship" and its behavior (see "The Fantastic Flight of JAL 1628" by Bruce Maccabee at www.nicap.org/reports/jal1628-2.htm), which were extensively covered by the media.

These three reliable witnesses eliminated all known explanations for what they observed at close range for an extended period if time. If this object was a secret military exercise, the pilots would have been informed as such and would not have spent 31 minutes evading and reporting a UFO, according to Callahan.

Callahan studied the data back in 1986 at the FAA Technical Center in Atlantic City, and recorded a video of the radar tape synchronized with the 30 minutes of voice tapes. Copies of this material and other official data documenting this case remain in Callahan's home office today.

In contrast to the O'Hare incident, the FAA did conduct an official investigation two months after the Alaska event—mainly because there *was* radar, and because "public interest" forced greater FAA involvement in the case. The FAA wanted "to ensure that somebody didn't violate airspace we control," a spokesman explained at the time.

However, the investigation concluded that the radar returns from Anchorage were simply a "split image" due to a malfunction in the radar equipment that showed "occasional second blips" that had been mistaken for the UFO. Yet all three controllers engaged with the pilots during the incident filed statements with the FAA that contradict this finding. "Several times I had single primary returns where JAL1628 reported traffic," wrote one. "I observed data on the radar that coincided with information that the pilot of JAL1628 reported," stated another.

"It was what I call coincidence that the split image happened to fall at the right distance and the same side of the aircraft that the object was reported by the pilot," said FAA spokesman Paul Steucke in early 1987.

The FAA stated it therefore "was unable to confirm the event" and even though it praised the three "normal, rational, professional pilots," the final FAA report ignored the visual sightings altogether.

To this day, John Callahan disputes the findings made public by the FAA. "During the playback of the event I observed a primary radar target in the position reported by the Japanese pilot," he declared in a 2003 written statement. The radar signals were intermittent, he says, because "the UFO was painted as an extremely large primary target" and so "the FAA computer system treated the UFO radar return as 'weather.'" Regardless, the target could be seen near the plane off and on for 31 minutes.

The FAA's response to the O'Hare incident is predictable, according to the former official. When pilots report seeing such an object, the FAA "will offer a host of other explanations," he says. "It's like wearing a blindfold. It's always something else so it can't be what it is."

IGNORED SAFETY HAZARDS

Official policy makes no secret of the fact that the FAA wants nothing to do with such eyewitness reports, even if the unidentified craft is potentially life-threatening. The FAA Aeronautical Information Manual, in Section 6, "Safety, Accident, and Hazard Reports," states that "persons wanting to report UFO/Unexplained Phenomena activity" should contact an organization set up for collecting such reports, such as NUFORC.

(After the incident at O'Hare, two witnesses did just that, and those reports were then offered to the *Tribune*. However, neither was aware that the 560-page FAA manual indicated they should do so.)

The manual goes on to say that if "concern is expressed that life or property might be endangered" by the UFO, "report the activity to the local law enforcement department."

NASA's Brian Smith takes issue with the FAA directive. "There is a need to encourage reporting of *all* incidents regardless of the biases against particular categories of occurrences," he says. "A just aviation safety culture should encourage employees (both in the air and on the ground) to report unusual incidents, even when they seem trivial or outlandish."

"Managers need to learn not to shoot the messengers and that discovering bad or unexpected news is better than worse news; and that no news is worst of all," he went on to say, in response to questions about the O'Hare incident.

Sometimes, pilots and crew defy this bias and report these incidents. Richard F. Haines, former chief of the Space Human Factors Office at NASA Ames Research Center and now chief scientist with NARCAP, has collected thousands of reports by aviators and aviation professionals involving unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) inconsistent with known aircraft or nature. More than 100 of these involve safety hazards caused by an aircraft's proximity to unfamiliar flying objects or inexplicable brilliant lights, as documented in Haines's study "Aviation Safety in America: A Previously Neglected Factor" (www.narcap.org/reports/airsafety_p1.htm).

They include incidents of electromagnetic effects on avionics systems in flight such as spinning compasses, interrupted ground communications, distraction of aircrews caused by brilliant lights or objects cavorting nearby, or sudden evasive action by pilots to avoid a potential collision with a speeding disc. The data suggest that the objects "are associated with a very high degree of intelligence, deliberate flight control, and advanced energy management," says Haines.

Based on analysis of the pilot reports, the study shows that dramatic UAP near misses and high-speed maneuvers close to aircraft could be a hazard if pilots respond impulsively. It points out that no known collision has occurred and is not a threat "because of the reported high degree of maneuverability of the UAP." However, a mid-air collision with a UAP is possible "should pilots make the wrong control input at the wrong time."

Haines notes that the reports by the O'Hare witnesses are consistent with many others his group has received over the years, and that the incident does represent an aviation safety concern. Anything flying in controlled airspace should be under the real-time control of FAA controllers, Haines says. "This requires both communication with and positive identification of the object. Neither occurred."

Aviation personnel need to be informed about the possibility of encounters with unknown phenomena. "The element of surprise means a decrease in safety because it diverts the attention of the controllers that should be focused on landing planes. That is the danger," says ATC specialist Jim McClenahen.

Similar incidents to that at O'Hare have been reported around the world. In 2001, for example, Agence France-Presse reported that a Russian airport was shut down for an hour and a half "when an unidentified flying object (UFO) was detected hovering above its runway." The 1999 French Cometa Report described a 1995 Aerolíneas Argentinas Boeing 727 encounter with an object that reportedly extinguished the runway and airport lights as the plane prepared to land in the central Andes, forcing the pilot to pull up, only to find the luminous UFO maneuvering around his aircraft.

Experts who have studied such incidents (which the FAA apparently has not) agree that the familiar pattern of dismissal by the FAA and other agencies must come to an end; that ridicule is unconscionable and multiple-witness reports are of great value; that aviation safety must be primary, no matter what the cause of the infraction; and that the results of any investigation must be shared with other governments and made public.

Why is our government uninterested in a strange, highly technological object hovering over a major airport, as reported by competent airline personnel? What about passenger safety? Or national security? Or just plain scientific curiosity about an unexplained phenomenon?

It is inconceivable that certain government officials do not take such the appearance of a UFO such as this one very seriously; they probably do not want to alarm the public by acknowledging the existence of unknown flying objects they can't control. Yet an event of such potential magnitude belongs to all of us. Sadly, inane explanations like "weather" or "spilt beacons" seem to do the job of making it all go away for the time being.

In the meantime, to many observers of these patterns of denial, the official dereliction of duty regarding credible UFO reports remains almost as incomprehensible as the flying discs themselves. ✦

MARS ROVER FINDS SILICA

A patch of Martian soil analyzed by NASA's rover Spirit is so rich in silica that it may provide some of the strongest evidence yet that ancient Mars was much wetter than it is now. The processes that could have produced such a concentrated deposit of silica require the presence of water. Members of the rover science team heard from a colleague that the alpha particle X-ray spectrometer, a chemical analyzer at the end of Spirit's arm, had measured a composition of about 90% pure silica for this soil. The newly discovered patch of soil has been given the informal name "Gertrude Weise," after a player in the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League.—*Science Daily,* May 22, 2007.

A TRICK OF THE LIGHT

BY MICHAEL D. SWORDS

Light can play tricks on the eyes, and in ufology, it can also play tricks on our minds. Are all cases of mysterious lights part of the UFO phenomenon? I've compiled a variety of experiences in this article to help us ponder this question.

March to October 1966. Toledo, Oregon. Two teenagers, Kathleen Reeves and her girlfriend, were walking on a rural road near their homes when they thought they saw a neighbor's field on fire. The fire seemed, oddly, dome-shaped. They continued along and saw another, much smaller, duller light, like a flashlight with some sort of dimming cap over the beam. Kathleen thought that someone was trying to play a trick on them, and she tossed a rock at the light. Startlingly, a group of much larger lights came on all around the small one. The two girls were very frightened and ran home.

After this weird event, over the next several months the Reeves home became the site of what in former times would have simply been called poltergeist phenomena. This consisted of both sounds and lights. The sounds were disturbing enough and featured a noise like a high-pitched saw or a giant whirring top, but the real bizarreness was the lights. Here is one instance as reported by Kathy's mother, Eveyln:

> One morning about 2 o'clock, I woke up and my whole bedroom was a rosy glow so bright you could read a newspaper by it. I was scared to make a noise . . . I happened to turn toward the door leading into the living room and I saw this red thing—like a cloud—just hanging there. It was watermelon colored and you could see through it. It was just a kind of hazy mass there for a couple of seconds, and then it disappeared, like that!

Next were the "wall donuts." These were small rings of light that seemed to crawl all over the bedroom walls. They were from 1 to 30 inches in diameter and became a psychological if not sleep-arresting nuisance. The Reeves tacked sheets over all the windows, but to no avail. Visitors came and observed the lights. Sometimes the donuts played about on the outside surface as well. A local scientist noted that, in one instance, a light spot appeared at one end of the house and another at the other end, seemingly placed so as to give the impression that a beam was penetrating the whole structure—but no beam could be located in between, nor any external source. Never, in any of the incidents, was anyone able to find a beam or a source. The donuts were just there.

The grandfather of modern parapsychology, J. B. Rhine of Duke University, was consulted about these mysteries. He said that the manifestations reminded him of several older European poltergeist cases, often labeled "spirit lights" by the witnesses. But he felt that it was odd to see such bedroom intrusions in modern times, and never in regard to any so-called UFO phenomenon. Rhine may or may not be correct about associations with UFOs (that area in Oregon *was*, simultaneously, involved in a UFO flap, and the witnesses who saw the donuts thought that they were probably related), but he was wrong about bedroom lights, as we shall see.

Fall 1962, Anaheim and Azusa, California. In Anaheim, Arlene Cook was awakened by her young, and terrified, son. Something was in his bedroom, he claimed, so she went to investigate. The room was dark, except for a half-dollar-sized spot of light on his bed. The spot stayed visible when she put her hand on the bed or when she removed the covers (that is, it was as if a beam ended right there). But she could find no beam or source for the light. The spot then just switched off, never to return.

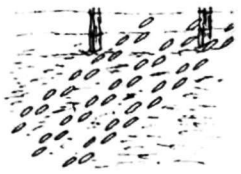
In Azusa, Patricia Ellingson was seeing "glowing, flame-like lights" in her bedroom every evening. She felt that they appeared when she was mentally quiet, as in prayer or reverie. The lights were the size of a quarter or larger, and would sometimes switch off abruptly, and other times die out slowly. The phenomenon became intermittent, sometimes not appearing for months. She became emotionally attached to them:

> From the first, I was deeply impressed that the light is not an "it" or a "thing" but that a wonderful personality is involved. I feel so happy afterward! When weeks go by without seeing the lights, I feel unexplainedly sad.

These last two cases are merely self-reported personal experiences, so maybe we should discard them, but there's enough weird-lights-from-nowhere-in-the-bedroom reported that perhaps we should give them the benefit of the doubt. Here is another one from the Timmerman Files, just as it appears in the book *Grassroots UFOs*.

Michael D. Swords is professor emeritus of the Environmental Institute, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo.

Sometime around 1981, Newark, Ohio. This is a case where there were traces left on the ground but their description is difficult to understand. I'll give you my best guess. Otherwise, the details of the case seem pretty clearly stated, although royally mind-boggling. A husband and wife were sleeping in their farmhouse when their dogs sent up a terrific row. They could hear some people talking outside their window, in some nonunderstandable "foreign" language. They didn't get up to investigate. The next morning they saw traces sort of like footprints outside. There were three sets of what seemed to be bipedal walkers, creating elongated (about twelve inches) "scratch mark" prints as they went. The prints were very "perfect" in form and stride, and went all the way to the fence line and through it.



And then . . . the couple began to have a "visitor" at night for about the whole next month. It was a "perfectly round white circle of light." Not a ball. It was about an inch and a half in diameter. The circle:

> would start here and go clear around that wall. And it bugged me so much, it about drove me crazy. I put the blinds, the curtains, so that this light could not come in. But it did anyways, believe it. At night when the lights was out, you could see it. It would come in and go clear around this room and sometimes stay there. This happened probably about a month straight. I suppose this happened. It about drove me crazy. Because no matter where I put them curtains and how I pulled them, we still had that light going around that room. It moved around as though someone was looking the whole room over. It sort of moved slow. Clear around the room. Sometimes it even, well would stop, say in the middle of the room or past the middle, it would stop there and it would stay there for maybe hours. Yeah, just like a circle open-ended of energy light. I don't know what created it or how it come from, but . . .

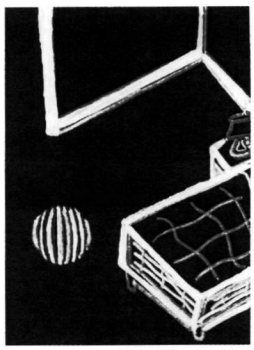
John then asked how well they slept. "Not too well, believe it." Yes, we believe that for certain.

So what the heck was this all about? Extraterrestrial anti-sleep squads? Blundering high technology? Anything to do with UFOs at all? Well, let's drop back a bit in time for our next case.

Mid-19th century, somewhere in California, as reported in the *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research.* In the house of an absent relative, a visiting family was bedded down for the night. A child awoke and saw an unexpected light in the direction of the kitchen. He went and told his mother. She sent him back to bed and went to investigate. As it was reported:

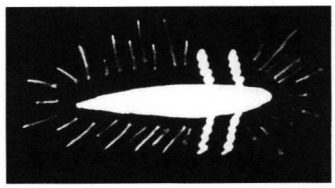
> The next day at my uncle's, mother was telling about it. After I called her attention to it, she said the light began at the bedroom door, about the size of the head of a nail, and went around and around, until it was about the size of a plate, then flashed all over the room. It did this three times. She did not know what to think of it, and told my uncle of it. He said, quite likely someone passed with a lantern and the curtains were up, and it shone in. Mother was sure the curtains were down. When we returned, before retiring, mother made sure the curtains were drawn.
>
> That night, she said, the same thing occurred, the lights three times, the third time flashing across the bedroom, to my brother's door.
>
> People all said it is a warning. As I remember, mother used to tell of it, saying that within two months of each other, my brother, father, and aunt, mother's sister, died.

UFOs?



May 1977, Gloggnitz, Austria. A young radio technician was lying in bed during a local power blackout. Suddenly a 50-centimeter in diameter hollow globe made its appearance over the bedroom floor. The ball was made of separate red bars of light. The silent object began moving slowly toward a glass door. The witness jumped out of bed and (clumsily, in my opinion) bumped into the ball with his leg. He felt little or nothing, and there were no aftereffects of this contact. The bars of light, however, began shrinking in diameter, causing the ball to dim and gradually disappear. No traces of any kind were left behind. Hmmm. UFO?

June 1979, Boardman, Ohio. A female medical doctor was visiting her parents at their home. Everyone else had retired for the evening, but she couldn't sleep, and the night wore on into the 3 o'clock hour. She was in the TV room with the set off when she was alerted to a flashing outside the window, which she first thought must be a firefly. The flash, however, was illuminating the entire area outside the window.



Then it came into the room—right through the closed pane of glass. It passed three feet from her face, looking a bit like a two-dimensional, highly electric, insect fuselage. It then came to look a bit like a paperclip, flashing on and off, and completely invisible when off. It meandered about, not apparently interested in her. She was now terrified and waited until the path to the bedrooms was clear, then ran for it. She did not look back to see what happened to the object. Jenny Zeidman, one of our better investigators, wrote up this incident as "The Thing That Got into the House." Very apt. But what *sort* of thing?

August 1959, New Matamoras, Ohio. Kathleen O'Rourke was retiring early with her son and daughter in the one bedroom of their apartment. Sometime during the night, her son yelled her awake. There in the room were a dozen globes of yellow light hovering over her son's bed. They were circling about a foot above him. The spheres were three inches in diameter.

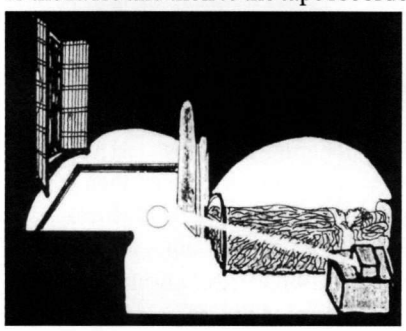
Then a second group entered the room, passing right through the wirescreen of the window. They split, half joining the first group and half sailing over her. Then a third group passed through the wire mesh. All of them went to her bed and began circling:

> As I lay there dumbfounded but curious, I suddenly had the impression that all those lights were behaving as if they were as curious as I. Ridiculous as it sounds now, they seemed to be curious about something pertaining only to me and my son, for not one of the lights went anywhere near my daughter's bed. I watched them closely even as I felt around in the darkness for the light beside my bed. At the moment I pressed the switch, the lights above me changed into straight-edged streaks of light and disappeared in a flash.
>
> To allay the suspicions of skeptics, let me add that I examined both screens immediately and found no holes nor any sign of damage. Further, I am a thoroughbred country-type gal who knows a lightning bug when she sees—or smells—one!

I can almost hear the thought processes of some readers. One group will tell me that all these cases are bogus. Another group will claim that they're all ball lightning. And a third will state that they're really abductions. But, let's soldier on for now.

June 1972, Logroño, Spain. A student at a college of theology was lying in bed at 2 a.m., listening to music. The room began to brighten and, to his terror, the louvers on his windows began opening inward, admitting a brilliant ball of light, between 30 and 50 centimeters in size (the thing was somewhat oval). He hid all but his eyes and upper face under the cover as the object moved silently, about six feet off the floor. He could barely look at it.

The thing was affecting his radio, causing it to make hi-pitched beeps. He then made his one courageous move: he snuck an arm out and turned on his tape recorder. The ball of light slowly came lower. A beam of light reached out, first to the radio and then to the tape recorder. The beam was then drawn back into the ball. The object rose, paused, and raced out the window. The radio continued to beep for several seconds and then the sound died away.



The sounds from his radio were recoverable from the tape, but, as usual in these matters, the analysis of experts became so esoteric that one doesn't know whether the sounds were anomalous or not. Another feature of this bedroom visit was a high strangeness element rarely seen inside but reported outdoors surprisingly often: The object manipulated light so that it took on the behavior of a solid, delimited beam, rather than a normal radiant source. These beams with cut-off ends are a bit mind-boggling. Are they somehow related to light spots and donuts from nowhere?

June 1973, in the middle of the Tyringham, N.S.W., Australia flap. One of the main percipients of events in this flap was awakened about 2 a.m. with an "uneasy feeling." She lit a cigarette. Her room was quickly engulfed in light—light so bright that she could not distinguish objects right next to her. This happened despite the fact that the windows were dark-curtained. Then suddenly the light was gone.

One of ufology's best, Bill Chalker, describes the case as if the light must have come through these dark curtains, but I wonder. If Jill couldn't even see a cupboard right in front of her, she couldn't be sure of a light source one place or another. Is it possible that (in one sense), the "simplest" thing happened: that the space around her was just, somehow, filled with light?

December 1984, Trafford, Pennsylvania. Finally, a polite light ball. A husband and wife were up late watching television when they were interrupted by somebody tapping on their window. Well, it wasn't in any obvious sense "somebody." Instead, it was a red ball of light. It began to go away, and they turned on their outside lights to watch it. It had black marks in among the red and gave off beams of light and sparks. It seemed about as big as a basketball.

Over the neighbor's house it floated, and they went back to their TV. But their spherical friend returned and politely tapped on their window again. Hospitality being a lost art, the couple still refused to offer the friendly light ball entry, and it gave up and went its way. Opportunity lost?

June 1966, Templeton, Massachusetts. It was 3 a.m. Edward Argerake was fast asleep when suddenly, despite fully drawn shades, his bedroom exploded into brilliant daylight. The shocked witness heard a pinging noise, and a light source or sources beyond the shades appeared to pulse with diffraction rings.

This light source wasn't so benign. Edward began to feel numbness, increasing in his body until he fell backwards. He tried to get to his feet, but the sound grew louder, the numbness greater, and he lapsed into unconsciousness.

At 6:15 a.m., he jumped up awake and the light and sound were gone. He was understandably rattled by this and became much interested in the UFO literature. His own experience was treated like a UFO case, investigated by a UFO investigator, and inspired him to become involved with UFO research. He later joined NICAP's Massachusetts unit and became a good case researcher.

But was this a UFO? In his letter to Raymond Fowler, the (very objective) Edward wrote, "I would first like to

point out that there is no apparent connection between this incident and the UFO phenomenon."

That is a remarkable comment, and one we would do well to often remind ourselves of when reviewing other such cases. He, and I, do not say that this was *not* a UFO case, but we do say that no UFO was in view and we should consequently watch our assumptions.

February 1968. Templeton, Massachusetts. A brilliant flood of light abruptly awakened a woman in her bedroom She could barely look toward the window, and then became paralyzed. The light went out but she could still not move. Her hands and feet ached, and her face was immobile.

Then the light flooded the room again. Then it went off. It did this seven or eight times, with her bedroom fan alternating off and on in parallel. She would hear pings from the area of the fan when it sped back up.

At about 5 a.m. the experience was over. She slowly recovered over the next several days. NICAP Massachusetts assigned someone to investigate who could relate: Edward Argerake.

February 1976, near the Tasman Highway, Australia. A husband and wife had retired for the night, and she was asleep. The man put out the light and prepared to lie down, when three entities walked through the door—not the doorway, the closed door. These beings were 7–8 feet tall and entirely "dead black" as if clothed in black velvet. Their hands appeared like, or were enclosed in, mittens.

The shorter (seven-footer) touched the husband's leg and he went numb to the waist. Strangely, he didn't feel frightened even when they applied some kind of glowing sack to his body. When the creeps started over to his wife's bed, though, his knight-protector instinct kicked in and he protested. One entity tried to muffle him, and he grabbed at it. The thing caught his arm and it, too, went numb. The man used his other arm to throw objects at his wife to wake her. She stirred and swung around. At that, the entity near her stepped onto the window in one giant step. It burst into an illuminated orange portal, and all three vanished into it . . . right through the venetian blinds and all. The wife never saw anything but the mess her husband had made.

Hmmm? This could be a little easier as a UFO.

September 1977, near Corozal, Puerto Rico. It was a Sunday, a day of rest. It was not at night but just about 3:30 p.m. And it wasn't in the bedroom, but outdoors. A 74-year-old farmer was resting his bones in a hammock when he had an impulse to get up and move to a certain spot with a nice view. He heard some popping noises resembling small fireworks. Then, a flash, and an elongated bright blue candle appeared. The object moved toward him, making an increasingly loud, roaring engine noise as it came. It dropped down just beside him.

The candle then abruptly became a three-foot high dwarf, accoutered in a jacket and tie. His face was "ugly" and his nose was ape-like. Still, his manners were impeccable and he gave the farmer words of encouragement *and a physical exam*! (Gordon Creighton wondered whether this case prefigured a program of extraterrestrial Medicare.)

Then the dwarf stepped away and took in the scenery, remarking, "how nice Puerto Rico is." With that jolly note, he turned into a flaming blue candle and vanished upwards like a flash of lightning. The case researcher said that people all over the place were encountering these dwarves.

UFOs OR NOT?

Well, I could go on and tell you about the 1979 Rowley Regis, England, case where a lady had three winged fairies (3½–4 feet tall) fly in her door going "Zee Zee Zee," asking for water and mince pie, and fleeing from cigarettes, but I've about had it. Mrs. Hingley, however, said that she felt "blessed" by the experience.

The pattern in all these is that there is absolutely no obvious pattern. In these cases of lights (and related phenomena) in the bedrooms (or at the house, in general), it's not only never the same, but its not even definite that we are in the land of ufology. It is easily possible that the majority of these experiences happened as the witnesses reported them (that is, the people weren't liars, hallucinating, fantasy prone, or whatever). But it's also possible that few, maybe even none, of these incidents had anything to do with the core UFO phenomenon—experiences which (whether they turn out eventually to be or not) *look like* they are associated with aerial technology of an advanced, nonterrestrial capability. But, the *majority* of the cases we've just reviewed were handled by UFO investigators and placed into the UFO case files. In our enthusiasm for mystery, and our proper conservatism not to leave anything out, we've probably been creating quite a jumbled mess.

One other thing. Almost all these cases were, in one way or another, lights-in-the bedroom. This type of light is interesting because it is one of the indicator questions on the famous (notorious?) 1991 Roper Poll that purported to estimate that several million Americans have been abducted. As much as I like my UFO colleagues, Budd Hopkins and David Jacobs, I have disliked the Roper Poll. I do not believe that the indicators work as advertised; I know of no way that they could be independently, objectively normed, and this exercise (which began just for fun with a few sort of similar wall-crawler cases) has led me to think that quite a lot of lights-in-the-bedroom can go on with (essentially) no hint of abduction. Although not 100% true, nearly all these cases have people avidly watching the phenomena from beginning to end, and even when critters show up, they want to do their thing right there on the spot.

If many anomalistic light-in-the-bedroom experiences occur (comparable to those in this article), and if many of them don't have anything to do with UFOs, let alone CE4s, then I think that we should reassess using at least this question as having any obvious relationship to "on-board experiences."

On a less contentious note, what in the world *do* we have

(continued on page 22)

THE DEATH AND REBIRTH OF OFFICIAL FRENCH UFO STUDIES

BY GILDAS BOURDAIS

France drew international attention in March 2007 when GEIPAN, the official service in charge of investigating UFOs, announced that it was beginning to put all its UFO files—1,650 reports in total, containing testimony from some 6,000 witnesses—on its website. These reports had been gathered in more than 30 years of investigations, since its creation in 1977 (actually, some earlier cases are on file as well). The release of these files is what French ufologists had been demanding for years, some of them suspecting the authorities of hiding UFO files from the public. Actually, the files now being made public appear to be more of the "sleeping kind" than of the secret kind. GEIPAN has finally taken this decision in order to put an end to these speculations. It is not certain, however, that it will end the question of possible secret files, which would be held outside GEIPAN, with a military "secret" stamp, as we will see.

GEIPAN is a small part of the prestigious Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales (CNES), with its website at www.cnes.fr/web/5038-geipan.php. There was incredible worldwide demand to access the files (unanticipated by CNES, whose servers weren't up to the challenge), and it was difficult to impossible to access the site in the first few weeks. A similar huge number of visitors deluged the *Chicago Tribune* website after the paper published a story on the UFO that was seen over O'Hare Airport, November 7, 2006. Interest in UFOs remains pervasive, even when discounted and discouraged by the establishment.

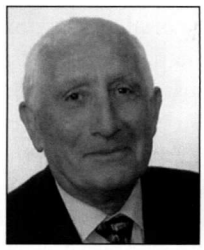
Entrance to the CNES Toulouse Space Center

Gildas Bourdais is a longtime French UFO researcher who has written books on Roswell and UFO history, including OVNIs: La levée progressive du secret *(JMG, 2001). This article is based on a talk he gave at the San Marino Symposium, April 2007.*

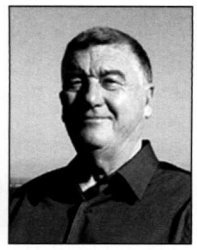
GEIPAN (Groupe d'Etudes et d'Information sur les Phénomènes Aérospatiaux Non identifiés, or Group for Study and Information on Unidentified Aerospatial Phenomena) is the current name of the French UFO project. Its mother agency, CNES, headquartered in Paris but with a research facility in Toulouse, is the French equivalent of NASA. GEIPAN has almost the same name as the first French government UFO project, GEPAN, created in 1977, but with an "I" added for "Information." Indeed, information is the primary goal of GEIPAN, with the task of releasing all the files on the CNES/GEIPAN website. In order to better understand the present situation, let's first briefly review the history of French official UFO studies.

BORN, KILLED, AND REBORN

The first organization for the study of UFOs in France, GEPAN, was created in 1977 by the director of CNES, Yves Sillard, who named engineer Claude Poher its head. It was supervised by a Scientific Council, to which it had to report its activity at least once a year. Poher had already done personal work on the subject, after reading the Condon report and meeting with American astronomer and UFO researcher J. Allen Hynek. Also, a previous decision had been made, in 1974, to systematically gather reports about UFOs from the gendarmerie (military police) and transmit a copy of them to CNES. At that time, the gendarmerie had collected more than 300 reports and was collecting about 100 new reports a year. The same year, a committee of the Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale (IHEDN) had made recommendations for the creation of such an organization. I should remark here that, from the beginning, there was a special



Yves Sillard



Claude Poher

Toulouse. Jean-Jacques Velasco parle enfin.

«Oui, les ovnis existent»

Jean-Jacques Velasco parle enfin sans retenue de ses travaux. Et croyez-nous, il s'agit d'un événement pour tous ceux qui s'intéressent aux informations sérieuses tombées du ciel. Jean-Jacques Velasco, on connaît bien ce nom en France, particulièrement dans la région toulousaine: c'est le «Monsieur ovni» officiel du pays. Il mène depuis 27 ans une enquête scientifique sur chacune des apparitions disons «curieuses» au-dessus de nos têtes. Surprise, celui qui a si souvent été sollicité, mais qui s'était peu exprimé, devoir de réserve oblige, déclare aujourd'hui sans ambiguïté dans un ouvrage (1) coécrit avec Nicolas Montigiani, à paraître le 22 avril, «Ovnis... l'évidence» (éd. Carnot) que, eh bien, oui, «Ils» existent, et oui, «Ils» sont d'origine extraterrestre. Jean-Jacques Velasco, ingénieur opticien de formation, dirige depuis 1983 au sein du Cnes (Centre national d'études spatiales) à Toulouse le SEPRA (Service d'expertise des phénomènes rares atmosphériques), l'une des très rares structures de ce type sur la planète.

«Monsieur ovni», Jean-Jacques Velasco. Photo DDD.

Le SEPRA, c'est béton question compétences: il bénéficie depuis sa création en 1977 (d'abord sous la dénomination de GEPAN) de l'appui permanent d'un conseil scientifique de haut niveau. Une quarantaine de spécialistes des disciplines spatiales du Cnes lui ont apporté leur concours. Sa mission consiste à enquêter sur le terrain à partir des procès-verbaux dressés par la gendarmerie et des observations militaires. Sur 5 800 cas étudiés, près de la moitié révèlent des causes parfaitement identifiables (ballons sondes, phénomènes naturels, fusées, etc.). Mais 13,5 % échappent à toute explication rationnelle. Pour Jean-Jacques Velasco, bien que niés par les politiques, les ovnis sont les manifestations d'intelligences lointaines. Nous en reparlerons.

A.B.

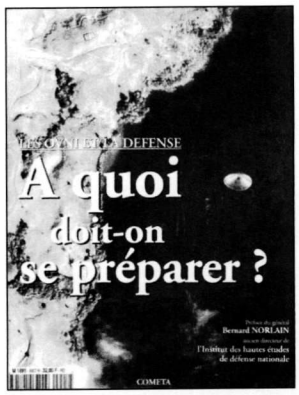
Jean-Jacques Velasco

interest of the military in the study of UFOs, in contrast with the seeming lack of interest, if not open hostility, on the part of many people in the scientific and intellectual establishment. This explains why, after a couple of years at GEPAN, Claude Poher resigned. He said later that he was disappointed by the apparent lack of interest of the Scientific Council, in spite of the support of Yves Sillard.

From 1979 to 1983, however, GEPAN was quite active, led by a young engineer, Alain Esterle, and the staff expanded to 10 at one time. (For the early history of GEPAN, see Gildas Bourdais, "From GEPAN to SEPRA: Official UFO Studies in France," *IUR* 25:4, Winter 2000–2001, pp. 10–13.) The project had the luck to come across several very interesting cases, prominently those of Trans-en-Provence in 1981, and of "L'Amarante" in 1982. GEPAN published its findings on these cases in *Technical Notes,* numbers 16 and 17. They drew a lot of attention, even abroad, but apparently the scientific establishment did not welcome them because, shortly afterwards, the activity of GEPAN was drastically reduced. Esterle left and his assistant, Jean-Jacques Velasco, took over the operation of GEPAN. Velasco managed to keep the activity alive, but with very reduced means. In 1988, the name GEPAN was even dropped and the project was renamed SEPRA, a curious name meaning Service d'Etude des Phénomènes de Rentrées Atmosphériques (Department to Study Atmospheric Reentry Phenomena), which did not refer directly to UFOs any more. The Scientific Council was essentially closed, and no more technical notes were published.

After a period of great confusion about the fate of French UFO studies, the service was eventually reactivated at CNES in July 2005. Here is how it happened. Toward the end of the 1990s, SEPRA had very limited activity, and some people would probably have liked to kill it for good. But others claimed that it should be reactivated and granted more resources for a new beginning. This was the opinion of the Cometa Report in 1999 (see www.cufos.org/cometa.html), written by an independent group comprised of senior officers, both military and civilian. (An English version of the entire Cometa report is online at www.narcap.org/COMETA_Part1.pdf and COMETA_Part2.pdf.)

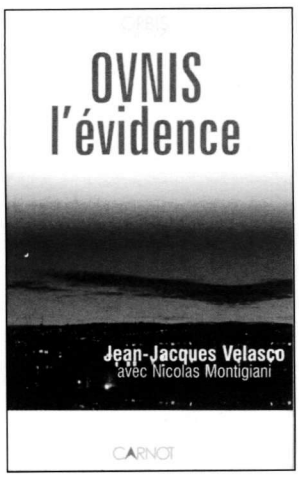
I want to correct a mistake, seen in the U.K. *Sunday Times* article of March 25, "Spooky . . . They Start a UFO Website Then it Crashes." It mentions the Cometa Report (without naming it) as a French government publication released by the IHEDN (Institut des Hautes Etudes de Défense Nationale). This is incorrect. The report was by a private group, the Cometa, even if is true that it had been encouraged at the beginning by the head of IHEDN, General Bernard Norlain. But it is has probably been influential in the reactivation of French UFO studies.



The original Cometa Report, published in a special issue of VSD *magazine*

At CNES, the new director Gérard Brachet decided in 2001 to audit the UFO project. It was conducted by an outsider, François Louange, an expert in photoanalysis who had participated in UFO studies at CNES. In 2002, Louange gave—like the Cometa but independently—a favorable report that recommended the reactivation and the new development of SEPRA. It was echoed in the French press, notably in an important article in the major newspaper *Le Figaro* in November 2002: "OVNIs: L'état doit y consacrer plus de moyens" (UFOs: The state must give more resources for their study).

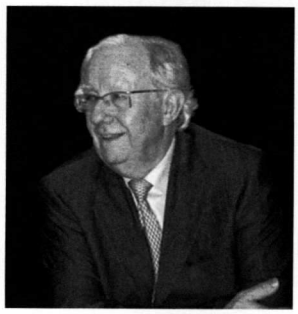
Surprisingly, CNES then decided to close SEPRA, in January 2004. What had happened? Most probably, some influential people were opposed to that reactivation. But it is a fact that the man in charge of SEPRA, engineer Jean-Jacques Velasco, after some 20 years at the "UFO desk," had made up his mind to come out and give his personal opinion about UFOs. He was just completing a book, published in April 2004, under the rather provocative title *OVNIs: L'évidence* (UFOs: The Evidence). There is a play on words in this title because the primary meaning of "evidence" in French is "obviousness." Velasco meant that the reality of UFOs is obvious, and he worsened his case by adding that their ET origin is very probable as well, just like the Cometa Report did in 1999. Presumably, his book also weighed in the decision to close SEPRA. The conservative magazine *Ciel et Espace* announced in June



2004, "CNES buries UFOs," a deliberately shocking title. But it was not the end of the story!

The rebirth of SEPRA, as GEIPAN

A new article in *Le Figaro* on July 31, 2004, revealed that CNES was now embarrassed by its decision and was already planning the rebirth of SEPRA, under a new name and with a new man at the helm. Finally, the decision was taken in July 2005 by a new director of CNES, Yannick d'Escatha, to again create a department for the study of UFOs. Another engineer was named to replace Velasco, Jacques Patenet, 59, with a long career at CNES in rocket launching, including French Ariane rockets at the site of Kourou in French Guiana. (Read a March 2007 interview with Patenet at www.cnes.fr/web/5871-the-plain-truth-of-the-matter.php.)



Jacques Patenet

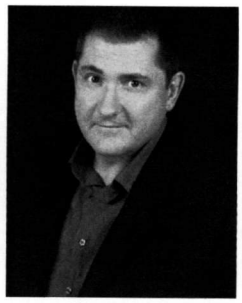
Like the old GEPAN, Patenet and GEIPAN are under the authority of the CNES hierarchy, but are also under the control of a steering committee, called COPEIPAN ("Comité de pilotage" of GEIPAN). This committee is headed by Yves Sillard—the man who created GEPAN in 1977—now retired after a brilliant career at the head of CNES and at other important posts.

At a first meeting in September 2005, the committee proposed to give the name GEIPAN to the reborn French UFO service. As listed on the GEIPAN website, the steering committee COPEIPAN consists of 15 permanent members: representatives of such civilian and military authorities as the gendarmerie, police, civil security, DGAC (Direction Générale de l'Aviation Civile), and the French Air Force; and representatives of the scientific world, CNRS (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique), the weather bureau, and CNES itself. As with the old GEPAN, agreements of cooperation have been created or updated with these different institutions. GEIPAN may also rely on a network of specialists, so that it is again fully able to work efficiently on new cases.

Release of the UFO files

In January 2006, Patenet announced that GEIPAN would soon put all its UFO files on the CNES website. That project has now begun with the release of some 400 files in March 2007, covering the period from 1988 to 2005. This caused quite a stir in the media, and even *Ciel et Espace* was obliged to correct its previous stance about CNES's burial of UFOs, with a new article in May 2006 titled "OVNIs: Le CNES ouvre ses dossiers" ("UFOs: CNES Opens Its Files"). Beware, there are UFOs, after all!

The release of the UFO files was announced in many newspapers with a positive tone. The well-known weekly magazine *L'Express* devoted six pages to the subject, something that had not happened for several decades in France. On the other hand, some trendy publications like the weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* and the daily *Libération* did not print one word about it. So, there is still, obviously, a long way to go in this country, which still sees itself as a champion of rationalism.



Yves Calvi

Recently, Jacques Patenet appeared, with Alain Cirou, the editor of *Ciel et Espace*, on a well-known TV program called *C dans l'air* (It's in the air) on March 30. Questioned bluntly by host and journalist Yves Calvi about the reality of UFOs, Patenet said unequivocally that, yes, there are UFOs, even if there are not many (in his opinion). Calvi then asked the same question of Cirou who, obviously embarrassed, gave a more evasive answer. I was invited, too, and I can say that it was a very amusing moment. I want to emphasize this incident because it signals perhaps the beginning of a new tone in the French media. Until recently, the same journalist would have rather invited, together with Cirou, the astronomer André Brahic, well-known for his total skepticism on UFOs. On the other hand, sociologist Pierre Lagrange, a friend of Cirou, was also there, but he gave signs of subtly changing his standard opinion on UFOs—from his usual psychosocial explanation to a slow recognition of a certain reality to UFOs. But let's forget about that and come back to the UFO files.

The first inquiries made by CNES began in 1977 with the creation of GEPAN, but there are files from the 1950s and 1960s, and even one from 1937. As we have seen, the gendarmerie already had more than 300 reports in 1974. In 1978, Poher made the first statistical study of the properties of UFOs, based upon 678 reports.

There are now 1,650 official files in France, including some 6,000 witnesses, comprising more than 100,000 pages of documents. The rest of GEIPAN's UFO files should be posted on its website this year (although that seems a rather ambitious goal). In any case, a first effect of this project seems to be a renewed estimate of the percentage of unknown cases, rather dramatically, as we shall now see.

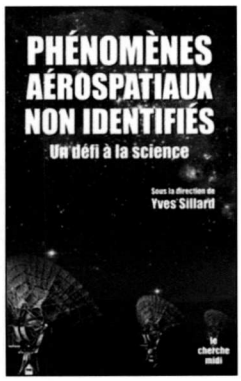
Unknown cases now at 28%

In March 2007, Jacques Patenet gave a number of interviews in which he warned that we were not going to find any new important but previously unknown cases: the best, such as Trans-en-Provence in 1981 (the alleged, brief landing of a small UFO, with traces left on the ground), are known already. However, there is some new information worth mentioning. The number of unidentified cases after serious study (unknowns are in the PAN D category), is now

estimated at 25%–28% (depending on the day of the interview, apparently). On the GEIPAN website, the percentage is indeed 28%. Here is the classification in the four key categories used by the project:

PAN A (perfectly identified phenomena):	9%	
PAN B (probably identified):	33%	(A+B = 42%)
PAN C (insufficient data):	30%	
PAN D (unidentified):	28%	

Please note that it would not be appropriate to add PAN C and D, which would make for 58% of unknowns, as some in the press have claimed recently in Canada (*The National Post*, for example). The percentage of unidentified is more than has been previously published. In recent years, the percentage of unknown phenomena was still given at around 13% or 14%. Actually, in his April 2007 book *Phénomènes spatiaux non identifiés*, Yves Sillard gives the following percentages:



PAN A:	18.4 %
PAN B:	28.1 % (A+B = 46.5%)
PAN C:	39.5 %
PAN D:	14 %

For his part, Jean-Jacques Velasco in his book, reissued recently under the title *Troubles dans le ciel* (Troubles in the Sky, Presses du Châtelet, 2007), still gives the same figures, very close to those of Yves Sillard:

PAN A + B:	46%
PAN C:	40.6%
PAN D:	13.5%

So, what explains this? It appears that GEIPAN has re-evaluated the percentage of unknowns, very recently.

Interestingly, this new percentage of unknowns (28 %) is more in line with the very first results from GEPAN, which had been established by Claude Poher, based on his analysis of 678 reports. Actually, the unknowns were much higher:

PAN A + B:	26%
PAN C:	36%
PAN D:	38%

Jean-Jacques Velasco also compares, in his book, the French percentages with those found in the 1950s in the United States by the Battelle Memorial Institute for Project Blue Book, which were kept confidential at the time but published later in the famous *Special Report 14*. Their findings, based on the statistical study of 1,959 usable reports from the period 1952–1954, were, using the equivalent categories:

PAN A + B:	49.6%
PAN C:	18.9%
PAN D:	21.5%

However, the most publicized percentage of unknowns, established in 1969 on the complete files of Blue Book (12,618 cases), was 5.5%. But we know that the Air Force had made every effort to reduce that number (and the percentage has increased since then as others, including Hynek, reevaluated the case files). So, the percentage of unknowns apparently remains, even today, a rather uncertain and debatable statistic. But it seems to be much higher than the classic, oft-cited 5%.

Secret UFO files in France?

A frequently asked question among French ufologists is whether or not there are secret files in France. When CNES announced the release of its UFO files, many people claimed with excitement that France was opening its "secret files." This was wrong and had to be corrected immediately. As I noted, these files were more likely to be covered by dust rather than by a layer of secrecy. According to Yves Sillard, in *Phénomènes aérospatiaux non identifiés*, there was at least a legal problem to solve, as the files don't really belong to CNES, but to the gendarmerie (which continues to collect witness testimony), and there are also some files from the Air Force. But now that these institutions are represented in COPEIPAN, they have agreed to the publication of the files, provided that all personal and private information is deleted.

That being said, a nagging question remains, in France as in other countries, about the existence of secret UFO files and studies. In Great Britain, for instance, Nick Pope, who staffed the UFO desk from 1991 to 1994 at the Ministry of Defence, still argues that he has not heard of any secret UFO files in his country. On the other hand, he freely admits that, in the famous case of an alleged UFO landing in Rendlesham in December 1980, there was undoubtedly a cover-up policy on the part of the U.S. Air Force, which was occupying the nearby air base at the time. So it seems obvious that the case of the United States deserves special examination.

But what about France? It's plausible that the French military retain *some* secret UFO files that have remained outside CNES. According to Patenet, the French Air Force in 1954 had created a documentation office called SEMOC (Section d'Étude des Mystérieux Objects Célestes) and presumably there are some classified files there that have not been released to CNES. Nevertheless, there is nothing in France comparable to the many rumors and testimony in the United States about government and military secrets and projects, including the Roswell case.

Some differences of opinion

Yves Sillard, the president of COPEIPAN, had already expressed his views on UFOs in several interviews as early as September 2005. He has done it again in his recent book. It is not an exaggeration to say that the opinions of Sillard are

a bit more affirmative than those of engineer Jacques Patenet in his own interviews, in the official presentation of GEIPAN on its website, and in his chapter in Sillard's book. One idea put forward by Patenet is that the extraterrestrial hypothesis is conceivable, but there is "not the slightest solid proof for it, or against it as well."

This is a very restrictive stance. The extraterrestrial hypothesis is very evident in the book, expressed not only by Sillard but by other contributors, notably the astrophysicist Jean-Claude Ribes, CNES engineer Pierre Marx, author François Parmentier, and police chief Dominique Weinstein, even if they don't all say so as clearly. Ribes and Marx discuss possible future means of exploration of interstellar space (which may have been already mastered somewhere else in the universe), and Weinstein provides much old data on cases worldwide that confirm the physical presence of UFOs in our skies, including radar and electromagnetic-effect cases. For his part, Sillard offers briefly in his introduction four primary hypotheses for the explanation of UFOs—psychological, secret military craft, rare physical phenomena, and the extraterrestrial hypothesis—and he has these words about the ETH (p. 19):

> [ETH] being the only hypothesis which, at the present time, brings an eventual perspective to explain the phenomena, the existence of which is indisputable; an attitude of frightened rejection without examination does not seem to be a good approach, however.

There is thus clearly some variance of opinion on UFOs, even among the people in charge of or associated with the new GEIPAN. The book, under the editorial direction of Yves Sillard, has the merit of showing these different opinions and attitudes honestly, and it is another notable event on the French scene, coming on the heels of the release of the UFO files. Again, the opinions expressed in that book range from mere skepticism about the extraterrestrial origin of UFOs (the stance of the Dominican theologian Jacques Arnould, who is a counselor on ethics at CNES) to an analysis of the tough problem of UFO secrecy, mainly observed in the United States, by contributor François Parmentier. Parmentier had already written a book on that difficult subject published in 2004, *OVNI: 60 ans de désinformation* (UFOs: 60 Years of Disinformation).

Sillard is obviously open to such a viewpoint, as we could already see in his interviews of September 2005, in which he criticized the American policy of denial of UFOs. However, he refrains from expressing it so bluntly in the book, which aims at a consensus. That is not an easy task, to say the least. Patenet, for his part, is careful to keep a distance between him and what could be considered radical opinions. Still, in his conclusion, Sillard denounces "the climate of suspicion and disinformation, even derision, that dismisses witness testimony and stems from a surprising intellectual blindness." These are strong words and a new tone, indeed, on the part of the president of the GEIPAN steering committee. We also note that Sillard pays tribute to engineer Jean-Jacques Velasco, who managed to keep the UFO activity alive, in spite of few resources and "very reduced moral support."

Cases, Explained and Unexplained

On its website, GEIPAN provides some examples of both explained and unexplained cases. As an example of the former, in 1985 near the city of Royan on the Atlantic coast, a metallic fragment was found that was at first presumed to be a piece of the Russian satellite Cosmos 1629. But on closer examination, it was officially identified as a German propulsive device dating from the Second World War.

Another example of confusion, according to the GEIPAN file, was the reentry of a Russian rocket stage that crossed France on November 5, 1990. There were many observations of that rocket debris burning in the high atmosphere, but not everyone, including me, agrees that the reentry could explain all of them. As a resident in a near western suburb of Paris, I came across a couple of witness reports about a big black shape coming over the area, on a trajectory that could hardly be confused with the Russian reentry owing to the angles of observation. Other reports, covering a large part of France, also don't fit well with the reentry.

Of cases that remain unidentified even after close examination, the GEIPAN website gives as examples three incidents, already well-known by ufologists in France—Cussac, Trans-en-Provence, and an Air France flight. I'll briefly describe them here for the record.

August 29, 1967, Cussac (Cantal). Two children herding cows saw little people around a landed sphere. As the sphere began to take off, the beings were sucked into it head first, and it left very quickly in a blinding light. The case was reopened and studied in depth in 1978 by Claude Poher.

January 8, 1981, Trans-en-Provence (Var). The most famous French trace case, which has been described in a GEPAN *Technical Note.* A retired worker in his garden saw a small, round craft land briefly and depart, leaving a circular trace on the ground. The investigation also revealed special compression effects on the surrounding plants.

January 28, 1994, Air France flight 3532. An Air France pilot named Jean-Charles Duboc and two members of his crew briefly observed, over the Paris metropolitan area, an elliptical UFO, possibly of large size. Radar also detected the object, making this a rare radar-visual case. However, its size is uncertain because the radar placed the UFO closer to the airplane than the pilot's estimate.

March 7, 1977, Chaumont (Haute-Marne). Another major case, mentioned by Jacques Patenet during his appearance on the program *C dans l'air*, is a very close encounter with a UFO by French Air Force pilot Colonel René Giraud, flying a Mirage IV military jet.

There are many more cases that are now beginning to be published. It seems appropriate here to mention at least two

(continued on page 24)

A TASMANIAN SIGHTINGS LOGBOOK

BY KEITH ROBERTS

In their *Journal of UFO Studies* article, "Australian Ufology: A Review" (Vol. 2, 1990, pp. 19–44), Keith Basterfield and Vladimir Godic mentioned the Tasmanian UFO Investigation Centre (TUFOIC) as having continuously recorded the level of sightings in Tasmania since the group's formation in 1965. This database was compared with the only other continuous record for Australia, maintained by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF). However, the RAAF ceased recording sightings in 1980, whereas TUFOIC has continued its log up until the present.

I initiated TUFOIC's logbook in 1969. Research through earlier records was made to complete the information since the group's founding in 1965. The logbook now covers more than 40 years of reports and records well over 4,000 sightings. The log provides the date and time of the report, witness and contact detail, then a brief note on the sighting and the results of the investigation.

Some similarities can be noted between TUFOIC's data and that collected by the RAAF. Both sets of figures show an increase in reports during the years 1973–1978, a time of heightened activity around the world. Also, both sets of figures note the decline in unexplained sightings in 1979–1980. It is a pity that the RAAF closed its investigation of UFO sightings at this time.

There are also differences in the data that may be more obvious than the similarities. TUFOIC tended to have a higher unexplained percentage, especially in earlier years; by the late 1970s, the RAAF had a higher unexplained percentage. The RAAF also recorded peak years about 1967–1969; no such peak is noted in the Tasmanian reports.

Probably some of the differences are due to the variation in sighting collection and investigation procedures. Moreover, during this period the RAAF was covering the whole of Australia. That there was no peak during 1967 to 1969 in Tasmania could be because the Centre was in its formative years; also, activity in that part of Australia was possibly at a lower ebb than elsewhere.

As noted, the Centre's unexplained percentage in early years was well above that of the RAAF. The Centre tended to receive many older cases which were added into the existing records, not something the RAAF probably did. As is the case elsewhere in the world, the stranger events are reported to a UFO group rather than a public authority. Many interesting cases surfaced years after the event, most of them usually uncovered during investigations into some other mundane event. The result is that unexplained cases would be added to earlier years while few, if any, explained sightings would be added to those figures.

The unexplained percentage of reports investigated by TUFOIC during the past 41 years is 18%. However, this figure increased during years of intense sightings in the mid-1970s and in 1996. The last few years have been 50% below the average in sightings.

Astronomical explanations are the greatest stimulus for a sighting, about 34% of cases being covered by this explanation. Aircraft account for 12% and come in second on the list, with satellites accounting for a further 9%. Reports with insufficient information cover about 10% of cases. The remaining percentage is made up by a spectrum of events such as flares, balloons, ground lights, weather, noises, and hoaxes, just to name a few (see Figure 1). The

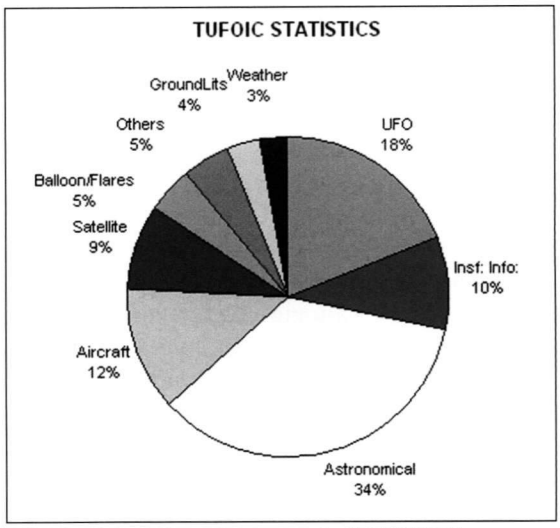


Fig. 1. Breakdown by type of all TUFOIC reports.

Keith Roberts is founder of the Tasmania UFO Investigation Centre. This article originally appeared in the Australian Ufologist *in 2004. It has been slightly edited and updated.*

greatest change in recent years among identified cases is the increase in red or orange lights, reported mainly in urban locations. We have no doubt that these cases are balloon or garbage bag hoaxes.

The most reports in the log book for a single year is 193 in 1976; this works out to be a call to the Centre every two days. This was a very busy time for those who do the investigation in their spare time. On the other hand, the lowest number of calls in one year was 46 in both 1984 and 1990.

The year with the highest number of unexplained UFO sightings was 1974 with 58. At the other end of the scale is the year 2002 with a meager 4 unexplained events.

Statistics can of course be used to prove just about anything, but TUFOIC's logbook and TASCAT Database do illustrate that the peak years for Tasmanian UFO sightings were the 1970s. Over 50% of all close encounters and 42% of nocturnal lights cases occurred during these years. The most recent CE2 report to the Centre was, until recently, in 1997 (one has recently been received from 2005). The last known vehicle interference case occurred in 1990. The bulk of the Centre's unexplained (43%) cases were reported from 1971 to 1979, with another peak (12%) in 1996–1998.

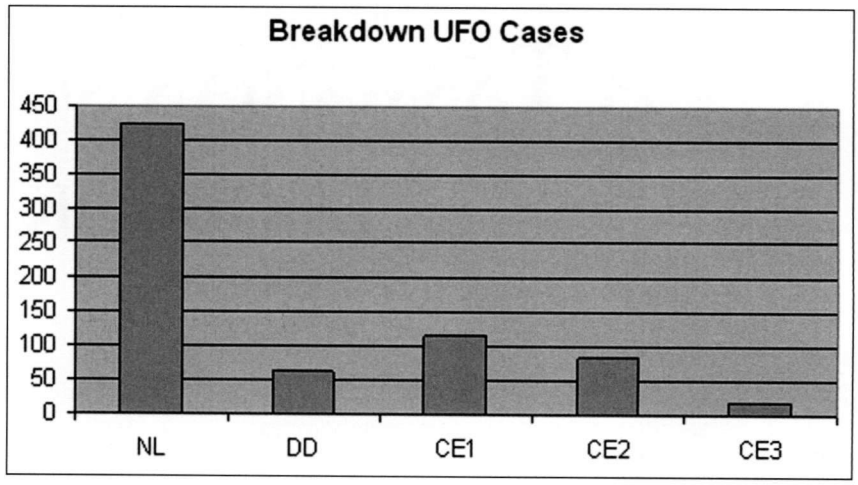


Fig. 2. Breakdown by Hynek classification of all TUFOIC unidentified reports.

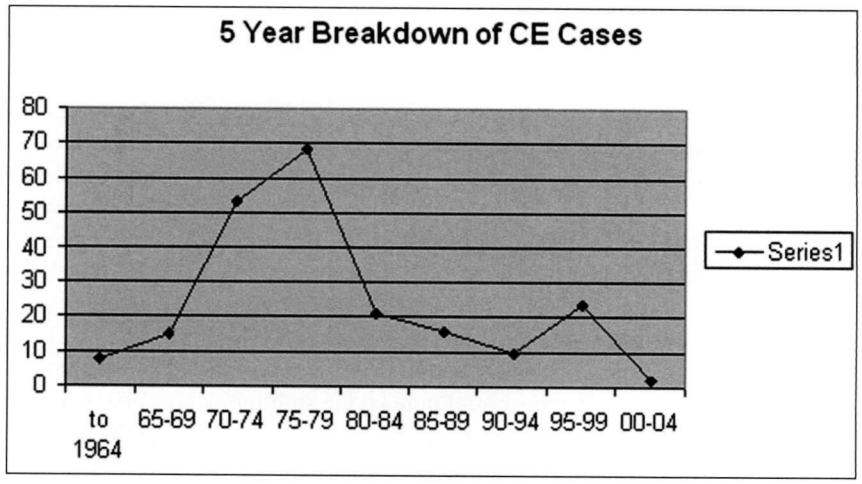


Fig. 3. Breakdown over five-year periods of close encounter cases.

As expected in a breakdown of unidentified cases (Figure 2), nocturnal lights are reported in the majority of sightings. Daylight discs seem to be more a feature of earlier years, the Cressy sighting by the Rev. Browning in October 1960 being a good example. Close encounters have been reported in diminishing numbers in recent years, and Tasmania does not seem to have a great many CE3 cases.

A breakdown of close encounters by five-year periods illustrates the increase and decline in this type of case over a 40-year period (Figure 3). The period prior to 1964 covers all the previous years.

Tasmania, of course, is not a particularly large part of the world; maybe it didn't take too long to check out the island. Maybe global warming has something to do with the drop in sightings, or has the public become bored with it all? Do witnesses now only have an expectation that UFOs are large, brightly lit objects and nothing else is worth reporting? Could it be changing life styles, media coverage, or even the way that UFO sightings are perceived and investigated that has changed our view of what is happening?

One thing that will not change is the data collected over nearly 40 years; it shows the highs and lows in the UFO phenomenon. Maybe, as in other fields of study such as the weather, we need to collect information over a much longer period prior to making any predictions with confidence about when (or if) the UFO phenomena will peak again. ✦

ORANGE UFOs OVER HOBART

On August 27, 2005, at 8:45 p.m., Dennis Speed was outdoors at his home in Lenah Valley, a suburb of Hobart, Tasmania, when he saw a strange formation. "They approached from the north," Dennis reported, "There were six of them. Six orange lights, the size of bright stars below cloud height in a scattered formation, moving slowly across the sky. There was no noise. Suddenly, they scattered about 500 metres [1,650 feet] apart. A white aura appeared in the sky around them." He watched them for about 15 minutes. Elsewhere in Hobart, up to nine orange UFOs were sighted. TUFOIC could not explain the sighting.—*Sunday Tasmanian,* Aug. 28, 2005.

More on Tasmanian UFOs

BY MARK RODEGHIER

Keith Roberts has ably reported on the status of Tasmanian UFO reports collected by TUFOIC in his article. He noted that the number of close encounter cases has declined in recent years, after peaking in the 1970s. We can further explore patterns in Tasmanian reports, and those collected by the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF), to look for similarities and differences.

Figure 1 displays the raw number of reports to TUFOIC and the RAAF, from the late 1940s to the present. The RAAF last officially collected UFO reports in 1983, but it began collection in 1950, well before TUFOIC was founded in 1965. One does not need to be a statistician to see that there is no correlation between reports to the RAAF and to TUFOIC during the period when both were in operation (for those statistically inclined, the correlation is indeed effectively 0, within statistical limits). The RAAF had a peak in reports in 1973, but while TUFOIC did have many reports that year, the peak for the civilian group fell in 1976, and the years from 1973 to 1979, inclusive, had many more reports than average. Oddly, there was even a steep decline in reports to the RAAF during the mid-1970s.

There is no clear pattern in the number of reports to TUFOIC—no cyclic trend—but we can see two broad peaks, separated by a deep trough in the number of sightings from about 1980 to 1992 (this corresponds to a similar worldwide decrease in sightings, perhaps the subject of another *IUR* article). Oddly, the number of reports to the RAAF was increasing in the early 1980s before case collection was discontinued (see Bill Chalker, "The Australian Government and UFOs," *IUR* 22, no. 3, Fall 1997, pp. 17–22, 36).

Figure 1 displays all reports, both IFOs and UFOs. What about only UFOs? Do we see the same patterns? Figure 2 provides the answer to this question.

The number of RAAF unknowns is generally less than for TUFOIC for the same period. This may be a consequence of the typical approach of government investiga-

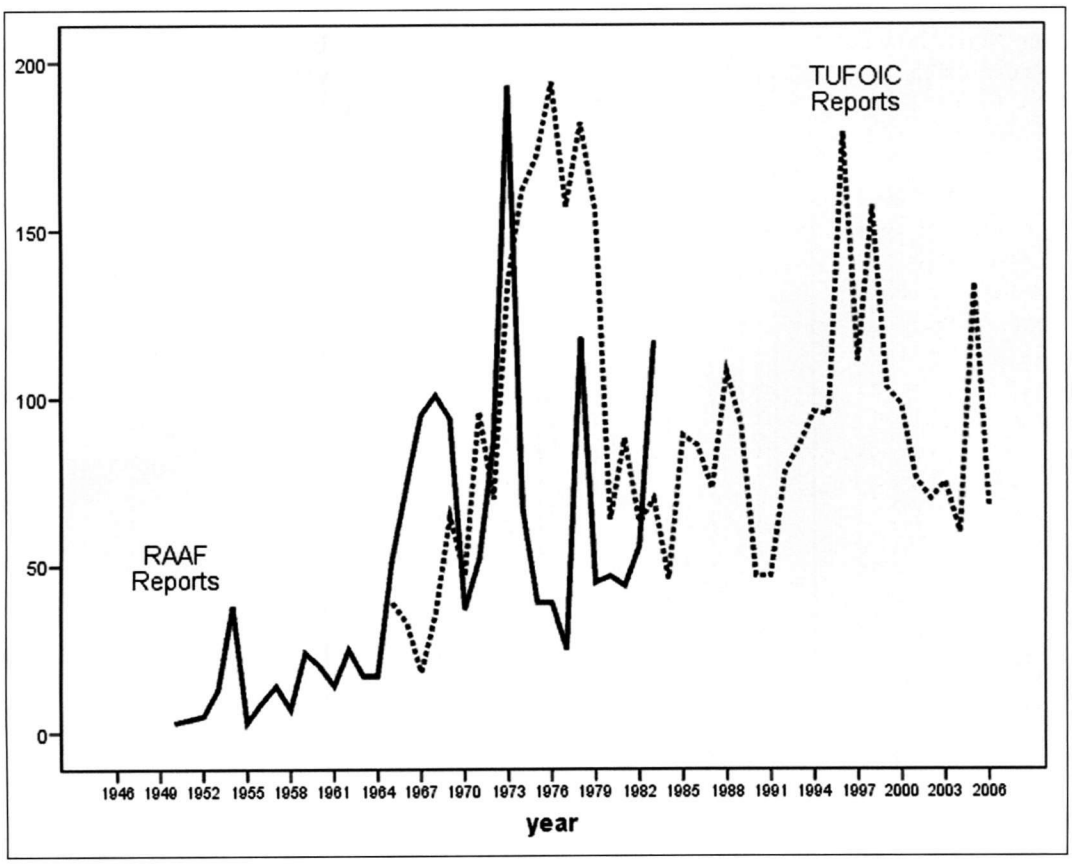


Fig. 1. Yearly number of UFO reports to the RAAF and TUFOIC.

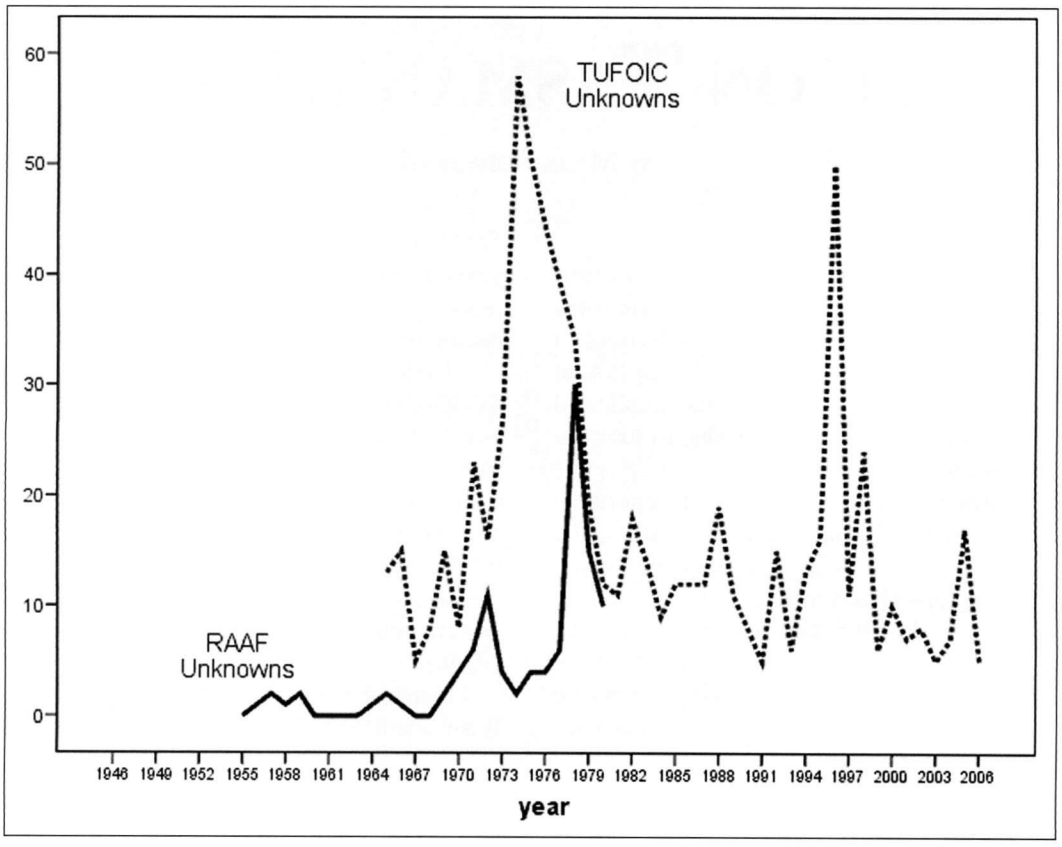


Fig. 2. Yearly number of unidentified reports to the RAAF and TUFOIC.

tors to classify a case as explained if there is even a hint at an explanation. Notice how the increase in reports in the early 1980s is not mirrored by a similar increase in unidentified sightings.

TUFOIC unknowns follow the same general pattern as all reports, but the peak year of 1974 is now more pronounced compared to nearby years. There is a sharper peak in the mid-1990s, attributable to one year, rather than two,

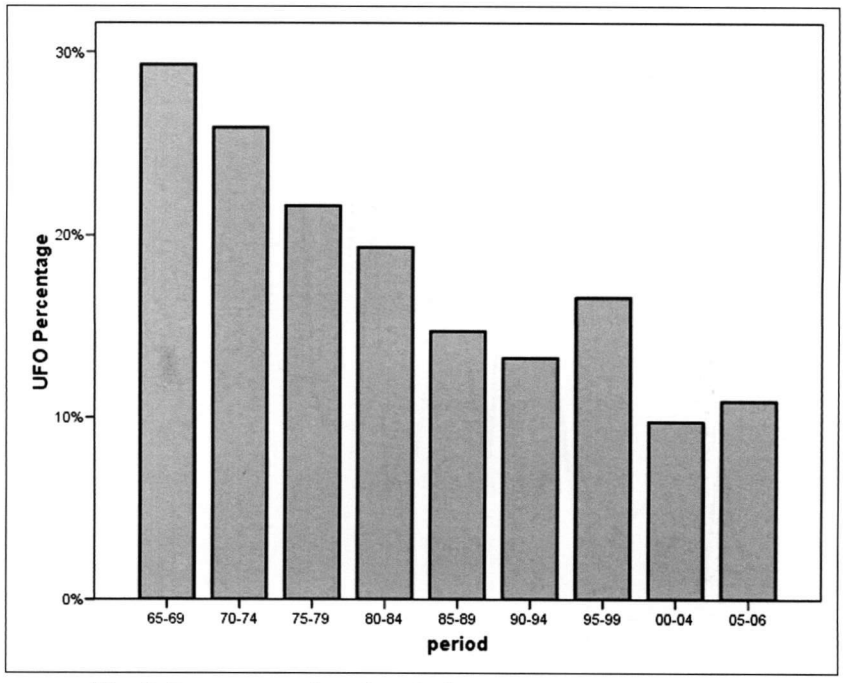


Fig. 3. Percentage of unidentified UFO reports to TUFOIC by five-year periods.

and the peak in 2006 is no longer as evident (as most cases in that year could be explained).

Still, the general shape of the two curves for total reports and unexplained reports for TUFOIC are roughly similar.

Now we can ask a follow-up question. What is the proportion of unidentified cases over time? Roberts mentions that the unexplained percentage of reports is 18% over the total lifetime of TUFOIC. Has this percentage been relatively constant, or not?

Figure 3 supplies the answer, which is quite intriguing. The bar chart displays the proportion of unknowns in five-year increments, to match Figure 3 in Roberts's article. The percentage of unknowns steadily declined from the early years of TUFOIC until the first half of the 1990s. It has increased, and decreased, since then, but has remained much lower than earlier periods.

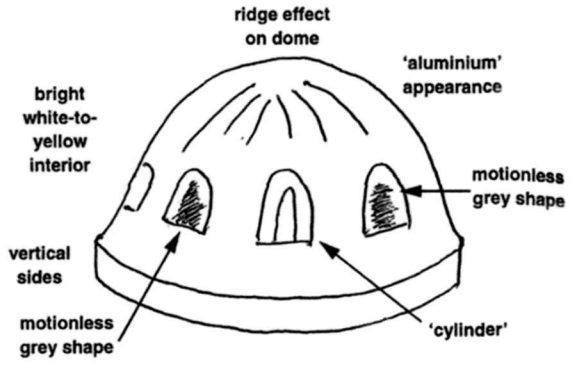
Simply put, whatever the trend in the *number* of unexplained sightings, the *percentage* of unexplained reports has declined by about two-thirds since the 1960s. Looking at Figure 2, we can also see a decline in unknowns since the late 1970s, punctuated only by the large peak in the mid-1990s.

What does this trend mean? One possibility is that TUFOIC has been getting better at doing investigations and is increasingly able to find explanations for UFO reports. Thus, over time, the percentage of unknowns would decrease. Another possibility is that the public has become less knowledgeable about what appears in the sky and is more likely to misidentify various phenomena as UFOs. This would increase the percentage of easy-to-explain sightings, thus decreasing the percentage of genuine UFOs. But although I'm as cynical as the next fellow, I don't see any direct evidence for this in the U.S. (and see no reason why Tasmania should be any different, except for those garbage-bag UFO hoaxes Roberts mentions).

Of course, there is a third option, which is that there *are* fewer UFOs appearing in Tasmanian skies. This, too, would mirror a general trend I've observed in several other countries. The percentage of close encounter cases has declined even more than the percentage of unknowns since the mid-1970s. In the last 10 years in Tasmania, there has been only one close encounter of the second kind, and no vehicle interference case since 1990. It isn't much of a stretch to propose that, with all respect to the investigators of TUFOIC, the decline in the percentage of unknowns is real, whatever its ultimate cause and meaning.

I'd like to add a final word of praise for Roberts and his associates at TUFOIC. Not only have they operated one of the oldest continuously existing UFO groups in the world, but they have maintained an accurate record of their investigations and made it freely available to other researchers, thus allowing analyses such as those in this article. This is laudable. The United States has no such comparable database of which I am aware, but we certainly could use one. ✦

TASMANIAN LANDING IN 1976



A 39 year-old man in Little Oyster Cove, Tasmania, encountered a landed dome-shaped object in February 1976. Through the windows of the metallic UFO, he saw a tall cylindrical object that he likened to a ship's compass mounting and "motionless grey shapes" like car seats with headrests seen from the rear (perhaps entities). The object rose slowly from the ground, then increased speed and was gone. The following morning, a circular patch of scorched grass was found at the site.—*Summary of case report by Bill Chalker, www.ufoevidence.org/cases/case630.htm.*

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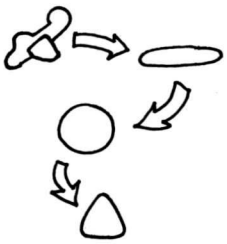

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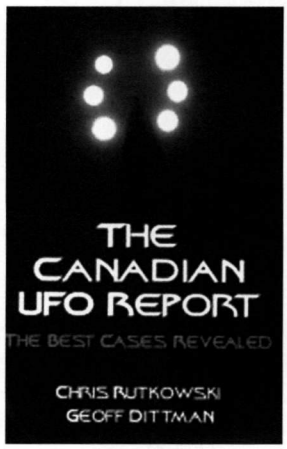
LIGHTS—*continued from page 11*

here with these cases? If most of these reports are valid (which I feel is true), then the anomalies mainly feel more like intrusions of some kind—things popped into a very localized spot without an intermediary "route" by which they came. They orient themselves well to our general three-dimensional space, but, at least initially, disregard the electromagnetic (chemical, materials-binding) forces which normally insist on the impenetrability of matter. Gravity also seems irrelevant, but they can maintain proper distance from massy objects. They deal with that part of our reality they wish to, and ignore the inconveniences of the rest. Maybe it *is* all extramundane technology, after all. ✦

BOOK REVIEWS

The Canadian UFO Report: The Best Cases Revealed, by Chris Rutkowski and Geoff Dittman. Toronto, Ontario, Canada: Dundurn Press, 2006. 333pp., illustrated, index.

Unorthodox books perhaps call for unorthodox reviews. This overview of the UFO phenomenon and human reactions to it in Canada is unusual in several respects. Of the 45 "chapters" (rightfully in quotation marks), 19 consist of three or fewer pages. The chapters through page 288 where the main text ends—not surprisingly, given the snippets masquerading as chapters—average six pages each. Fortunately, the longer chapters tend to be the meatiest and most informative. Another oddity is that each chapter has a listed author, and most are separately authored, a few jointly authored.



Why were these stray bits and pieces called "chapters" rather than being incorporated into one or more full-fledged chapters? One possible clue is that the authors alternate between serious, critical-minded discussions of important cases and somewhat light-hearted reporting about human foibles, the latter in a more folkloric style. The table of contents, oddly, does not call the short entries chapters and in fact contains eight untitled sections that would have been better called chapters. Some of the entries seem out of place altogether (e.g., "The Village that Disappeared?")

One gets the impression that the authors were uncertain about how to organize the book and how to balance the treatment of the sacred and profane aspects of the subject. In any event, the resulting product is a genuine overview of UFOs and human foibles as manifested in Canada. The sociological aspects of the subject, including belief systems, IFOs, government responses, kooks, and cranks receive almost equal treatment.

The authors display a properly critical attitude toward UFO sightings that is a welcome antidote to the all-too-typical UFO buff, who tends to interpret anything in the sky that appears the slightest bit unusual as a visiting spaceship. They also do assemble a good collection of hardcore cases that tend to defy explanation, and they display true open-minded skepticism throughout.

In addition to important historical cases such as the 1967 Stefan Michalak close encounter and physiological evidence report, the 1967 Shag Harbour crash case, and the multiwitness 1996 Yukon close encounter case,the authors record numerous substantial lesser-known cases from the 1990s and early 2000s. The survey thus is up to date and contains a good amount of important information that will be new to most readers around the world.

Among the particularly informative and interesting chapters were these containing new details about and insight into Canadian reports:

- Chapter 12, "The Falcon Lake Incident"
- Chapter 18, "The Falconbridge Radar/Visual UFO Case"
- Chapter 28, "Ebenezer's Ice Cream Cone" (purported 1990 crash case)
- Chapter 40, "Government UFO Investigation"
- Chapter 43, "UFOs and Alien Abductions"

Appendix A lists "The Strangest Canadian UFO Reports," and Appendix B compiles "Canadian Cases Listed Among the Blue Book Unknowns." The book is well referenced and contains a 7-page, two-column index.—*Richard H. Hall.*

Flying Saucerers: A Social History of UFOlogy, by David Clarke and Andy Roberts. Loughborough, U.K.: Alternative Albion, 2007. 231pp., illustrated. www.hoap.co.uk.

Clarke and Roberts have a reputation, particularly among American researchers, as the *enfants terribles* of British ufology. To many, they seem outrageous skeptics, perhaps even debunkers, who neither believe in the reality

of UFOs nor have much tolerance for those who do. This has inspired some sparkling internet duels on both sides of the Atlantic where, following a long discussion of the facts, the hatchet is eventually buried (probably in somebody's head) until the next round is triggered by a new fundamental disagreement.

This is an oversimplistic interpretation of these two ufologists, who actually do not always see eye to eye on everything themselves. And it also misses the most important point about them—that they are field investigators with long-term experience and prodigious capabilities. Their work ranks among the finest ever produced within the U.K., and even those who find their hard-headed objectivity difficult to take ought to respect the sheer time, effort, and determination that goes into their intensive deconstruction of a case. They have a tendency to worry at the evidence until it reveals its secrets and have been known to chase leads and witnesses all over the country in the pursuit of their *cri de coeur* that no evidence is good enough unless it is documented first-hand, straight from the horse's mouth.

You can disagree with how they evaluate what they discover or the general conclusions that they reach—not always as negative as you might assume. But what no one who sits down and studies their work can possibly do is ignore the enormous strides that it has made in gathering new data and vital documentation and in opening up avenues of exploration that others can walk down afterwards at their leisure.

They have transformed how we see the British government's role in UFO investigation and, whatever you may have heard, they were largely responsible for the release of many files and the discovery of secret research into UFOs that might never have seen the light of day otherwise. This is an achievement for which they should be hailed by most of their contemporaries, were it not for the fact that they do not see this as proof of either a major cover-up or an extraterrestrial solution to the UFO mystery.

If you regard UFOs in either of these terms, then Clarke and Roberts may well come across to you as villains. In reality they are two of its heroes. The astounding interviews with government figures, witnesses, and military personnel that they have published and the mountains of official papers that they have secured are a legacy for everyone to share, regardless of how you then choose to interpret it.

David Clarke has a doctorate in folklore and was an on-the-beat journalist before he became a university lecturer. He started as a UFO enthusiast more than 20 years ago when he was a teenager. He began, like most of us, seeking evidence for UFO reality.

Andy Roberts has an even longer pedigree in the subject, starting as a regular writer in the 1970s who covered UFOs and other Fortean phenomena, notably Alien Big Cats and mountain men. His irreverent editorship of the journal *UFO Brigantia* in the 1980s earned him both fame and respect from skeptics and believers alike and made clear his intention to tell things as he saw them without much concern over hurt feelings along the way.

They have both earned their dues in the U.K. as council members with Britain's leading group—BUFORA—and they staged some of the biggest conferences in Britain in their native Yorkshire, bringing many of the top UFO writers from the United States and attracting huge audiences. These days, they inhabit the best-known discussion list for active researchers in Britain (ufologyinuk) but present themselves in public more as social historians who reflect on the people and societal changes behind UFOs rather than seeking explanations as to what UFOs actually are. This has been a useful tool to win friends and influence people in often unexpectedly high places and has evoked some of the breakthroughs that probably would not have come via more traditional approaches from UFO proponents.

In their last book (*Out of the Shadows: UFOs, the Establishment, and the Official Cover Up,* London, 2002) they tackled the British government study into UFOs via the documents and interviews they personally secured. But this new book is really on point with their approach as social historians, for it tells the story of how UFOs came to affect the people of Britain via the cases, the personalities, and media presentations of the phenomenon during its first 30 years.

The good news from this format is that *Flying Saucerers* is not going to set your hackles flaring even if you flat out detest their down-to-earth negativity regarding UFOs. For this is not really a book about the solution to the UFO riddle, but one that explores the people who created the modern UFO mythology from many different angles. It shows how the phenomenon that we live with today was molded and shaped by the people and events who were there as it was coming into existence.

As a result, the book is nothing as contentious or outspoken as you might expect from anything penned by Clarke and Roberts, and your blood pressure is likely to be spared. In fact, it is the perfect introduction to the real dynamic duo as I have known them for a quarter of a century. It will show you the good things about the work that they do. Even those who do not share their null hypothesis will find much to intrigue them in these pages.

Of course, do not expect this book to be bereft of any of their caution or criticism. That, I suspect, would be impossible. But it does not infuse this text, which deftly paints a picture of how UFOs came to be perceived by the general public and spawned the nascent UFO community.

The book opens with a foreword from Shirley McIver, the first person to gain a PhD from a study of UFOs. She looked at Britain after the release of the 1977 movie *Close*

Encounters of the Third Kind and sought to discover who became interested in UFOs and the motives behind these decisions. This leads neatly into the authors' own introduction where they explain that they see themselves as neither believers nor skeptics but agnostics as to UFO reality. Given that there are no actual UFOs to study, they muse, then the next best thing is to study the witnesses and the investigators and assess why we have reached the conclusions that we have. This is soft-science ufology, because there is (in their view) no real hard-science ufology to analyze.

From this point onward, the authors trace the UFO story in the U.K. with passing reference to the rest of the world. This is perfectly reasonable, as they are qualified to judge the situation in their native land and it does serve as a means to reveal in great detail how this phenomenon became an intimate and insidious part of the lives of even those who barely think consciously about UFOs.

In the process, they unravel some fascinating clues and new stories that cast light on events long past. For example, the way in which a study of the Mass Observation Project (state-sponsored diary keeping in the period during and just after World War II) revealed the creation of the first British UFO fanatic in July 1947 (as seen by his wife) is full of things to ponder, as is the revelation of an early British UFO novel (penned before anyone wrote a factual UFO book). Yet this comes complete with a tale of conspiracy and UFO crashes (one in New Mexico no less). It may create fevered debate on both sides of the argument as to what this means.

The rest of the book chronicles the events of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s in chronological order—with many intriguing stops along the way. We see how the earliest UFO societies formed. We discover the role played by the spiritually oriented UFO societies that have continued into the modern day possibly uniquely in the British Isles.

The 1960s were probably the high water mark of UFO acceptance in the U.K. as the real space race unfolded, Beatlemania and hippie culture embraced the saucers, and the southwest of England brought the first major UFO window area with the legend of the Warminster "Thing." Along the way the book takes in everything from the world's first space-baby case to the UFO associations of the Findhorn commune and the interweaving of UFO subculture into the blossoming music industry.

Many of these chapters cover areas that you will probably not find in other UFO books, but they offer a fascinating portrait of how the UFO phenomenon turned into such a rich array of people with their own very different ways of looking at the evidence.

The text really does not go beyond the end of the 1970s, thereby ending at much the same point as when Shirley McIver made her study. There are a few pages about the events of the next three decades and this is where I found myself having my only serious misgivings. The very brief coverage of the crop circle mystery was, I thought, rather misleading and would have been better left out if it could not be expanded. However, that is a pretty minor quibble that certainly does not detract from what I found to be the most readable and entertaining book that these two authors have yet produced.

Full of insights and snippets of information about long lost cases, scandals, or press stories that will revive your fascination in the historical byways of the UFO mystery, this book is a breath of fresh air in the world of UFO writing. It does not set out to tell you what the authors think is, or is not, to blame. It does not seem overeager to present evidence that proves one theory or another. It merely tells an intriguing story and shows why we live in world where everybody knows the term UFO and has their own interpretation of what that means.

Like it or not, your way of dealing with the UFO phenomenon is a direct consequence of the tales and testimonies woven together by these authors. And, of course, so is theirs! ✦

FRENCH UFO STUDIES—*continued from page 16*

other well-known cases in France, the Valensole trace case of July 1, 1965, and the incident called "L'Amarante" in Nancy, October 21, 1982 (the latter was also described in another GEPAN *Technical Note*). The Valensole case was seriously investigated at the time by the gendarmerie, and the case of Nancy was studied in depth by GEPAN. These two cases are included in Velasco's *OVNIs: L'évidence* and the newly released version of this book.

PUTTING FRANCE BACK ON THE UFO MAP

It is still too early to tell what will come of this new organization but, for the time being, it has already had a positive effect of renewing interest about UFOs in France, resulting in a number of articles, discussion on TV and radio, and even drawing the attention of the press and public worldwide. These are not secret UFO files, contrary to some press reports—but they do represent an outstanding effort, which will be scrutinized with interest in France and abroad, and which puts back French ufology on the map. ✦

GEN. CRAIGIE VISITED ROSWELL

Lt. Gen. Laurence C. Craigie, chief of the Research and Engineering Division at Headquarters Army Air Force, was sent to investigate the Roswell crash in the summer of 1947 on the orders of Gen. Curtis LeMay, according to Craigie's former personal pilot. Veteran USAF pilot Ben Games told a local UFO group in January that he remembers flying Craigie there, and said that the general met with President Harry Truman immediately afterwards. Games also said that the 35th Fighter Squadron he was assigned to in occupied Japan routinely tracked UFOs on radar at 60,000 feet in 1945–1946. The objects pulled 90-degree turns at 1,000 mph, Games added.—*Sarasota (Fla.) Herald Tribune,* May 30, 2007.